

The Christmas Bishop



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BY

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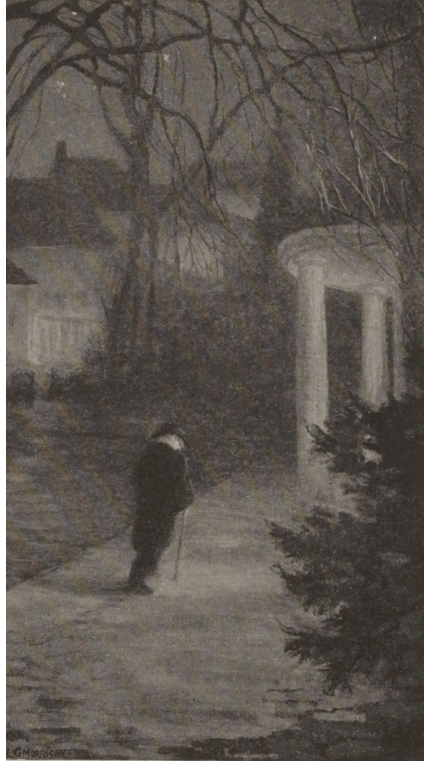
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THE CHRISTMAS BISHOP



Sometimes, against the dark faces of the housefronts, window shades were rolled up, like eyelids opening, on home-pictures that reminded the Bishop it was Christmas night

THE CHRISTMAS BISHOP

PART I

Christmas morning, blue-black, pricked with stars against the Bishop's window panes. Westbury lay asleep beside its curving river, the great old houses with gardens that ran terraced to the bank, the churches, the college, even the new teeming tenements at the bending of the water, all lay asleep in the Christmas dawning. The Bishop alone was awake, and against the darkness before his eyes pictures raced. He had been a poet once, so long ago that when sometimes they sang his hymns in church he had forgotten they were his, but he still kept the poet's trick of thinking in pictures during those strangely alert moments between sleep and full awakening. The pictures fell into the march of a poem.

It was a storied city built upon two hills cleft by a valley. On the twin crests towered great palaces and a temple. Where the hills sank toward the north, there were terraced streets and narrow climbing byways. There were markets and booths and all the signs of multitudinous life, but throughout all the place one heard no sound, saw nothing that moved, yet one knew that the whole city throbbed with the pulse-beats of innumerable homes. A gray pall hung low, as if the abrupt Oriental dawn had been arrested; the gray dimmed the marble of the palaces, and dulled the temple gold. In the silent gloom one waited.

One did not know whence he had come, the Child who was suddenly there, in the streets of that city without stars, a sacred city once; but wherever he knocked upon the portal, quickly all within woke to life, and became a teeming, bustling household; again, when he withdrew, all was once more silence and darkness.

He was a tiny child, barefoot and pale, some little lost waif from the mountains who had come seeking his kinsfolk among the homes. So fast he pattered over the pavement that his pale hair and his white tunic streamed upon the wind. His little yearning hands stretched out showed fair as a baby's in that wintry twilight. Ever and again he knocked and entered, and always, entering, his face flamed with hope, and always, coming forth, he was sobbing, for he found no welcome.

On and on he went, while each black street along which he hurried was stabbed ever and again by the opening and shutting of a ruddy door. In the silence one heard it plain, the heavy sound of a door that closed because it did not know him. At length he had passed the city portals and was mounting the hill-slope that is Golgotha, a form all pale upon the dark, blown hair and robe and pattering feet. There the Child turned, for it seemed he was the little Prince of that city, and all the folk his kin. Rising a-tiptoe he stretched out his hands, cross-wise, to them in love, and suddenly the sun, withheld, leaped kingly above the hills beyond Jordan, and the silent air was full of wings and of voices, the chant of the Christmas angels singing home the Homeless One, and in that flood of light and song all that city knew the Child they had lost their own, forever.

Slowly, before the Bishop's eyes, that gold radiance dimmed into the bleak gray twilight that was stealing over his room. Sharp as life shall strike at visions came a sound from below that struck the dreamy smile from his lips, leaving a twitching pain; certain sounds had that power of intolerable renewal. A homely enough sound, merely the thud of a lid dropped upon a flour bin, but it seemed now to be a flour bin in a doll-house pantry in their first Rectory, his and Annie's. He would seek her there before going out to his parish calls. She would be standing with her back to him, hands deep in dough, and would turn to him her cheek, olive that always went rose beneath his kiss. He could still hear the catch of her breath as she whispered good-by, for Annie, deeply joyous, had yet always treated joy a little apprehensively, as if knowing it would not last so very long. Looking back over many years, the Bishop thought how young Annie had been when she died, and Nan had been younger still. Nan! There it was again! That flash of hot pain through his head, followed by a numbing dullness, even stranger to bear. He had felt this several times of late. The Bishop ran a hand over his forehead. He seemed to be floating far, without thought, yet this was not sleep. Slowly, slowly, he drew back, but his thoughts were heavy, not clear. He seemed to lie there waiting, waiting for something. Surely thus he had always waited on Christmas morning. He listened. It would come in a moment. There! A scurry along the hall, the clatter of the door-handle, a rush, a jump, curls, lips, bubbling chuckles, little cold toes to be warmed

in his hand! Hear the shouts and the singing of her, feel the pummelling of her little hands!

“Christmas! Christmas! Christmas!” shrilling straight up to the angels! Was she not Christmas joy turned mad, his little girl!

He was full awake now. His lips formed a word. We are very weary of old pain repeated when we whisper out to God like that.

The Bishop wondered why people say that one grows used to loss, and that old age grows dull in feeling. Still he had got used to it, of course. This was Christmas, too; it was quite natural that he should feel it more on Christmas. He must be a little patient then with himself about it, perhaps, on Christmas. Yet when had there been a day when he had not missed them, his own!

The Bishop turned toward the eastward window, and on his gray and beautiful face fell the gray and beautiful morning, for the Bishop was one who had made God a habit, so that he turned to Him instinctively without thinking about it at all. And since also he was a man of quick visual imagination he thought of God quite simply: he saw Him standing there, between the bed and the brightening window, in the form of a young Jewish rabbi. He always stood there, to greet the Bishop's day. Together they always went about, step matching step, so that the Bishop was never a lonely man. To himself he always thought of the Nazarene as the Friend, because, so he thought, it was by loneliness that Jesus had learned how to love. Since the Bishop always thought in words and in pictures, it seemed to him that the Friend said to him now, “Rise. Let us go forth into the morning. It is Christmas. It is the day of giving.”

While he dressed, the Bishop still knew God standing there, but felt rather than seen, being lost sometimes in mist and dizziness. The spaces in the room were strange; it was a very long journey to the washstand, and the white window squares seemed to advance and then recede. The Bishop could see his brush plainly enough on the bureau scarf, but it was a long time before he could make his hand reach it. He had to smile quaintly at himself at last, for he was sitting on the bed mechanically counting the flower baskets in the worn Brussels carpet,

flower baskets that ran diagonally to the chair holding his coat. Groping a little, the Bishop achieved the coat, then stood trembling. Undoubtedly he was ill that morning, but Mrs. Graham should not know it! For he must go out, he must go to church, there was no service in all the year so dear to him as the Christmas communion at St. John's. He would force his blurring head to go through with it, and Mrs. Graham should not keep him in! Keep him in! A frown twitched on his forehead, an old man's helplessness at the thought of coddling. Why should a woman he had known but three years be so solicitous over his health, dictating about his rubbers and his socks—he was not ill, nor was he so very old! At that his brow cleared in a sunny flash of amusement, for of course, he was very old, eighty-one, and besides Mrs. Graham was very good to him. Still to-day she must not keep him at home, for to stand once more within the rail offering the chalice to his people had become a deep and blind desire, overmastering all sense of weakness. Besides, there were other matters and grave ones to be seen to, to-day. Somehow—he looked toward the eastward window—the strength would come for the day, as it always came.

Slowly, while he stood looking out into the morning grown rosy now with the coming sun, his head cleared more and more, as he thought about his Westbury as it brightened beneath the Christmas sunrise. Few towns, the Bishop thought, had changed so little in sixty years. He looked out on the same Westbury he had first seen when he had come to St. John's college as a boy. Stately old River Street with its twin rows of elms still curved to the curve of the river. Each quiet old house had in the rear a terraced wintry garden sloping to the wide and sparkling water. The Bishop knew each of these houses, even as far as Lucy Hollister's, which was beyond his sight. Lucy still kept the house of her girlhood where the Bishop had first known her, known Lucy and her cousin, Annie. Far beyond Lucy's house, River Street changed to towering tenements and grimed factories, the place of the strangers, where the Bishop often walked, but wistful and puzzled, for it was this part of Westbury alone that had changed since his boyhood, although even then it had been the place of work-people, for whom St. John's Southside Mission had been founded. The Bishop stood thinking of the mission.

Well in sight, breaking the row of houses set among their wintry trees, sprang the spire of St. John's, and beyond its Rectory lay the brown, cube-like buildings of the college above the sweeping river, a small college of mighty men. It was there that the Bishop and his roommate, Barty Judd, had learned to dream dreams. It was the glory of Westbury, the kindly old city, remote, unworldly, that it had set so many young men dreaming. The Bishop smiled to think how proudly Westbury still pointed to its seven bishops, for the spirit of Westbury had not changed in all the sixty years since the founding of the mission. Westbury had given the Bishop, he thought, the most beautiful thing in his life; it was this that brought the light to his face as he thought of the gift he wished to give Westbury in return, to-day, if—if he could! At that "if" his eyes deepened with a sharp and subtle change, then cleared as the passing thought of the day before him yielded to memories, and he saw the afternoon of the laying of the mission corner-stone. As they had walked home together, the Bishop, after long silence, had broken into boyish fire of words, seeing all his life before him. Lucy had listened and answered, but Annie had been silent.

Dreamer as the boy had been, he had never dreamed of coming back one day, long afterwards, and living to be an old, old man in the bishop's house in Westbury.

The sun was climbing to a golden blaze now, filling with hope the day before the Bishop. He was always a good deal of a child in his Christmas feeling. There was work before him on this Christmas day, in his own house and out of it. Quite simply he closed his eyes a moment, with bowed head, thinking of the Westbury he loved and of three within it, whom he should see that day.

The Bishop's tall figure swayed a little as he grasped the stair rail, and for an instant his gaze was vague upon the dusky hall, upon the gloomy wall-paper, the threadbare carpet. It was a gray and worn old house in which the Bishop's soul was harbored. A succession of housekeepers, under the oversight of Mrs. Hollister, kept it in order, but it needs the authority of kinship to change a wall-paper or a carpet. Thus it was that the Bishop's long hallway was hardly more his own than the pavement outside, or his own dining-room door before which he paused, hardly

more his own than the doors along his familiar River Street. His hand lingered on the knob, for, thinking of Mrs. Graham within, and of the testing now of his three years' hope, he had grown apprehensive and wistful. Then his face flashed firm in a smile, as he looked toward Someone beside him there in the dim hall. That little way of looking toward the Friend with a quick upward smile was one of the Bishop's habits engendered by solitude. He never meant to betray his thought publicly, yet sometimes wayfarers in the train, on the street, were startled at the sudden passing of strange light across the gray face, making it, as now in the opening doorway, the face of a little child. The Bishop bent toward the black-clad little woman before him the bow that belonged to the days of his youth. Age had stooped his shoulders, but never stiffened their grace, nor that of the sweep of his extended hand. His face—lean, clear-chiselled, blue-eyed, and heavily thatched with white—was ashine with Christmas greeting.

"I wish you a beautiful Christmas!" he said.

Mrs. Graham's glance met the Bishop's furtively. She had restless brown eyes beneath a tranquil parting of brown hair, curling and lightly silvered. Her mouth looked as if locked upon discontent. She was a stout, rosy little woman who moved in a heavy, bustling manner. She put her hand into the Bishop's awkwardly, never having become accustomed to one who shook hands as a morning greeting.

"Merry Christmas," she murmured perfunctorily, as, in the holiday absence of a maid, she turned toward the business of the Bishop's breakfast. The raised slide of the dumb-waiter made a gap in the solid paneling of dark cupboards occupying one wall. Like other dining-rooms on River Street, the room had two long windows looking toward the water. There was a wide piazza beyond them, hung with the gnarly ropes of leafless Virginia creeper. It was a dark-wainscoted room, but now the level eastern sun flooded it, and there was a great crimson spot of roses at the Bishop's plate. The table was set for one, he noticed; when Maria was away, Mrs. Graham insisted on serving him with her own hands, instead of settling comfortably into her usual seat. In the silent room, only the sound of the dumb waiter that creaked and rattled, but the Bishop was waiting to speak, after the long patience of

three years. When his breakfast had been set forth to her satisfaction, Mrs. Graham sank upon the edge of a chair near the window, keeping an alert eye on the Bishop's needs, but having also an air of absence.

"Well," she burst out at last, "so it's Christmas again!"

"Yes," the Bishop smiled, "'again.' It comes around pretty often, doesn't it? This is your third Christmas in Westbury."

"I wonder how many more I'll have, in Westbury."

"Is it such a bad place to spend Christmas in then, Westbury?"

"Bad for me, yes! After Fair Orchard!"

"But I had hoped you had begun to feel at home in Westbury."

"Me! At home! In Westbury! No, I've no place here and never can have. I see that plain enough,—just a housekeeper, anyway! I've no place in the place, I mean, like at home! Oh, there's no harm in Westbury! It's not as bad as some towns. There's show here, but it's not showy; there's money, but there's manners, too! Only there's no *heart* in the place! How could there be, with Dr. Newbold running the church and Mrs. Hollister running society?"

"They both have hearts, I am sure, Mrs. Graham."

"Maybe. Not for plain people, or poor people, though. Maybe for you. Although Dr. Newbold—" she broke off sharply, teeth on lip, while her eyes, too full and bright with meaning, changed before the Bishop's gaze, and she altered her unspoken sentence, concluding, "Dr. Newbold suits the place all right. He don't suit me, that's all. It's kind of spoiled church for me, going to St. John's, and church in Fair Orchard was such a lot to me. It's queer when you always hear about Westbury being such a strong church place that it should have spoiled church for me. It's all right when you preach, of course, Bishop, but it's something else I'm talking about. It was different at home—oh," her rosy face darkened savagely, "sometimes it seems as if my church was just another of the things she's taken from me along with my home and my boy!"

The Bishop closed his eyes an instant, seeking counsel.

“It’s Christmas that upsets me so! Christmas that brings it all back on me so. And then to-day she sent, Florence herself, she sent the baby’s picture on a post-card. It’s signed ‘From Florence.’ You’d think after all that’s happened, she’d have let Dan send it, the first word I’ve had from either of them for three years!”

She rose and filled the coffee cup abruptly. “Well,” she jerked the words out, “Christmas and other days, I’ve got to grin and bear it, being turned out by my son’s wife. But it’s been worse since there was a baby.”

“It’s the baby’s first Christmas,” mused the Bishop.

“Yes, he’s seven months and sixteen days old.”

The Bishop smiled up at her, “May I see him? Where is the picture?”

She laid it before him. The Bishop adjusted his glasses, then removed them to look from the picture to a keen scrutiny of the grandmother’s face.

“Yes,” she answered his look. “You see it then? The baby looks like us, like Dan and me. And I can see Dan’s father in him, too. There’s not a hair of him that looks like the Reynoldses,—that lot!”

The Bishop was examining the photograph minutely. Mrs. Graham looked over his shoulder, but at his next word she moved away again. “That’s his mother’s hand holding him, isn’t it, that shadow under his arm?”

“Yes! His mother’s hand! He looks like us, but he don’t belong to us! He’s hers!”

The Bishop glanced up, “And I suppose he’s also the other grandmother’s.”

“No! Florence has no mother. I’m all the grandmother that baby’s got!”

“I think you never told me that before,” he paused thoughtfully, then looking over to her standing by the window, he said, feeling slowly for words, “So the baby’s mother, that girl out at Fair-Orchard, has had no mother—to go with her—on that way—a woman goes, to bring home, a little child?”

The Bishop's voice was soft with the awe of many years ago. The grandmother flushed, muttering, "She would not have wanted *me*. She had Dan."

The Bishop's eyelids had fallen, quivering, over his eyes. He was far away; again he watched with Annie, with Nan, as he said, "But men cannot understand. God does not mean them to. Such things are a secret between God and women, like the coming of Mary's little child. Each mother needs a mother then. It was not—it was not till then that I understood how much my Nan had lost when she lost her mother."

"It did not live, did it, at all, your daughter's child?" whispered Mrs. Graham.

The Bishop shook his head, not speaking, thinking of the little waxen loveliness they had laid to sleep with Nan in the hollow of her arm. His lips showed their rare palsied trembling, murmuring, "Both together, Nan and the little one. She had been so well! I was not prepared—" the eyelids of his quiet gray face trembled, then opened on the blue eyes, as he said, "Of course, we know they do not die. They are alive, somewhere where the dreams come true that we dream for our children." He smiled into her eyes, "For we are great old dreamers, aren't we, we grandparents?" He raised his hand from the chair-arm, as if it would have pleaded, "But I think each mother needs the grandmother to help her dream. I think she is wanting you now, that Florence out there."

She faced sharp about, "Florence! Want me!" She looked at him in grim pity at his simplicity. "No, Bishop, Florence don't want me! No more than I want her! We're misfits, Florence and me,—worse luck for Dan, and for me, and for the baby, too, now!"

The blue eyes a-twinkle, "And worse luck for Florence, too," he persisted. "She sent you the picture. Wasn't it perhaps to say that she wants to show you the baby himself?"

"It's like you to think that, Bishop, but it's not like Florence to mean that. I understand Florence! I can still see her face plain, that last morning!"

"You have not seen her face since there was a baby. Perhaps she

understands you, too, now. Perhaps she understands, now, what it costs, to give up an only child to anyone.”

“That’s it, of course, that’s what finished me up, her getting Dan, the way she has. I guess I seem pretty mean to you, but Dan was all I had.”

“I think I understand,” the Bishop said quietly.

Arrested by his tone she turned, “Was he good, your daughter’s husband? Did you get on with him?”

“No one is good enough for an only child. Yes, he was good. He—he has been remarried for a long time, you know.” He spoke with long pauses, remembering, “Yes, I got on with him. I should have lost my daughter if I hadn’t. We had one happy year, together. Getting on is hard. But not getting on is harder.”

She did not speak, turned from him again toward the window, intent, musing.

“Isn’t it,” he pleaded, “harder?”

“You didn’t have to,” she spoke chokily, “get on with Florence! Maybe you could, though, you, Bishop. But I couldn’t! You couldn’t maybe understand how I can’t forgive her for all that she’s taken from me,—a man couldn’t maybe understand, even you. It’s the mother working in me. They used to laugh at me over home, and say I mothered all the village. Yet now I can’t get at Dan, nor at the baby. I haven’t anyone to mother, and it seems as if it makes me sort of,” she struck away a tear with an awkward gesture, “sort of smothery!”

His eyes bent on her in sharp intentness, “There is someone for you to mother!” he said.

“Who?”

“Florence!”

“Florence!” her voice hissed.

“Yes!”

Her trembling lips turned hard, “I guess I’d have to forgive her first!”

“Couldn’t you?” he questioned, while the blue eyes grew softly a-shine. “Couldn’t you, to-day? Couldn’t you, for instance, go out to them to spend Christmas, to-day?” His plan, long suppressed, came hurrying forth. “It’s so near, and so easy! Only thirty miles to that baby! The train leaves at ten, you have time. There’s another train back at seven-two. And you needn’t mind about me. I shall be out all day, first a visit I must make, then the service, and afterward I dine with Mrs. Hollister. You are quite free, you see, to go!”

“I’m free enough, yes,” she admitted, “but I haven’t the will to go, that’s all.”

“To the baby?”

“To Florence! It would mean making up with Florence!”

Lips and eyes showed a quick pleading smile as he said, “Isn’t that perhaps what Christmas and babies are for, for making up?”

She was silent, her breast in its tightly hooked black rose and fell. “But people!” she broke forth at length. “Everybody knowing! The village knows I was turned out, and that there’s not been a word between us for three years. I can’t go crawling back now, just because there’s a baby come,—everybody looking on, everybody knowing!”

“It isn’t everybody’s baby. It’s yours, and hers,” then gravely, “I was not thinking of other people. I was just thinking how much she needs her mother, that girl!”

“Florence!” she said, and there were many thoughts in her tone, slow, incredulous.

The Bishop’s eyes grew remote and bright, seeing Florence. He spoke a little dreamily, “She needs you now, and she knows she needs you! She may have been hard once, being young and without a mother. She may have been cruel. It is different now. She does not feel so secure now. They are so afraid for their babies, don’t you remember, always, these little new mothers. There are so many dangers lying in wait for the little men before they’ve got their armor on. There must be advice to give, and care to give—oh, Florence knows how much he needs his

grandmother! Go and see. Can't you? Couldn't you? I—I'm in such a hurry to have you go!"

"If I could only hold him once, Dan's baby!"

"Florence's baby, too," he corrected gently.

The brief light swept from her face. Her plump comfortable hands were knotted, and her round face drawn into dignity by pain. Her words were grave and final, "The way to that baby is only through Florence, so I can never go. I can never have him."

Involuntarily the Bishop's hand went to his temple in a gesture of pain, then instantly was forced down. He hesitated, then at length, "'Never' is such a long word," he said. "Sometimes God says it for us, but don't—don't let us ever say it for ourselves! You know," a passing tremor ran along his lips, "He didn't let me have the grandchild I hoped for, but don't—don't lose having yours. It seems as if I couldn't let you go on losing,—that. I am in such a hurry somehow to-day. Can't you go out there to-day, now? Take the baby the Christmas present his mother most wants for him, take him his grandmother!"

She turned on him, intense, "Bishop, do you know what it's like to make up with a person who's done you wrong? Do you know what it feels like to forgive? A person who'd hurt you? Where you care most?"

A moment he groped in past experience for the answer, then in a rush of realization it came upon him. He rose a little unsteadily, that he, too, might stand to face her, as she stood by the curtained recess of the window, where the searchlight of the Christmas sun fell relentless on the drawn intensity of her plump face. The Bishop's lean, corded hands rested on the two ebony knobs of the chair back. He did not notice, nor did she, that he swayed slightly with a passing dizziness.

"Yes," he answered slowly, thinking of one he soon must see to-day, "I know how it feels. Yes, I have had to learn, how to forgive—where I cared most!"

"How did you make yourself do it? How?"

He would have evaded if he could. "I only know the old way," he said

humbly, for the Bishop was shy in speaking of some things, as one is shy in speaking about any friend in his presence.

“Tell me how!”

“I only know one way,” he repeated simply. “We all get at the truth from different angles, so there may be many ways to learn to forgive, but I can only tell you about the way that I have tried.” The Bishop was so old that often, as now, his eyes showed the reflection of the harbor-lights in view. As always in his sermons, he had now lost, in his very consciousness of their needs, the presence of his audience in the overwhelming Presence of which he forced himself to speak, “The way I have found is to try always to see through His eyes. I think He is always very near us, trying always to lift us to the level of His eyes, so that we can look forth from that point of view. I think He is always trying and trying to say things to us to excuse—the people who have hurt us. If only we could clear our ears to hear Him! If only we could stand at the level of His outlook into souls! Then we should see so much that’s pitiable and excusable, so many handicaps and mistakes, so much to make us sorry for them that we couldn’t help forgiving. He always saw enough in every soul to make Him patient, and if we don’t see enough to make us patient, too, we have to trust His vision and insight, and forgive because He does.

“Yet it is hardest,” the Bishop’s face showed a passing shadow, as he looked inward upon past struggles and forward to that next interview of his Christmas Day, “to forgive those who hurt *Him*, His work. Yet he forgave even that, upon His cross. When we remember that, I do not know how I—how we—*dare* not to forgive.” He paused, while his fingers on the black knobs tightened, then the shadow of his face was struck away by the quick sunshine of reassurance. He looked toward Mrs. Graham, “You see,” he said, “it seems to me that if God in all His eternity has no time to be stern, then perhaps we—who have such a little while! have no time for anything but loving. Don’t you,” he pleaded, “don’t you think so, too?”

The ruddiness had paled from her cheeks. She was looking at him with wide, intense eyes.

“That’s your way, Bishop. But it’s what I couldn’t—ever climb up to,—I guess.” She had to fight to speak, against her choking breath, “I’m one of those you’ll have to forgive, I’m afraid, for not doing what you want. I wish I could, on your account. But it don’t seem as if I could make up with Florence. But I can’t bear that you should look like that, Bishop,—disappointed! Don’t, please don’t, mind! It’s just that I’m a mother who’s lost her boy, and wants him back and can’t get him, him and his baby!”

“And yet,” he answered, “they are all there, all ready for you, waiting, wanting you, all there! It is, it is, too bad!”

“Florence!” she whispered.

“Needing and wanting you most of all. Seeing, by the way her little one needs her, how much she needs a mother. Perhaps mothering is your way of forgiving. Couldn’t you try it? Florence has never had a chance, has she, to learn many things, if she has been a motherless girl? Perhaps she did hate you once. I don’t believe she hates anyone now. It’s very hard to hate when there’s a baby in the house. She sent the picture. She needs you. She knows she needs you, for she knows now what a child can miss who has no mother. Let us think of all she has missed, and not be too hard on her, you and I, any more.”

She was silent, one hand tense upon the curtain cord.

“It’s such a good day to go,” he urged, “such a good day to do the unexpected, Christmas! Everyone expects the unexpected, on Christmas.”

A comical smile worked on her set face, “You do, anyway, Bishop!” she said with a catch in the throat.

“I think I did allow myself to expect this,” he answered, “this making-up. Perhaps I expected it because I wanted it so, for I’ve been in such a hurry somehow, about that baby. Why, he’ll be growing up, while we’re still talking. You have three-quarters of an hour,” he glanced at the clock in quick remembrance of the visit to Dr. Newbold before church-time, “and you’ll go?”

He waited.

She was silent still, until she burst out, "I can't! I'd say 'yes' if I could, when you beg me so. But I can't say it, and I've got to be honest with you. I can't say it!"

Her face, working with sobs she forced down, was too painful to look at, yet it gave no hope.

"I am very sorry," he said quietly and turning went into the great study adjoining, which faced, like the dining-room, on the veranda and river. Suddenly very tired, he sank into his desk chair, pressing the tips of his fingers to his temples, which had such a painful way of throbbing every little while this morning.

"I did want it very much," he acknowledged to himself, "very much." He sat thinking, for some moments, then remembering, rose and went into the hall to put on his overcoat, whispering, "But it happened to Him like this always—always!"

About to go out into the street, he turned back. The dining-room door was shut. He opened it. Mrs. Graham was still standing in the window recess, her forehead pressed to the cooling pane. There was no one to see her face. Common-place, coarse, ugly with tears, lights were trembling across it. "If she needs me," she was whispering, "if she needs me,—" for a holy thing was being born.

In the doorway, wearing his old cape overcoat, his face like a wistful child's beneath his silver hair, the Bishop waited.

"You will go?"

She did not hear, nor know. She did not move until she started at a sound, the heavy closing of the outer door.

PART II

The river was a splendor of Christmas sunshine. A flurry of snow had lightly powdered the brown sod beneath the double rows of elms. Few people were abroad. Sometimes a little group of children, eyes and feet a-dance, and cheeks nipped red, went tripping past the Bishop. Older folk passed with hearty, careless greeting, for the stooping figure in the cape overcoat was as familiar and unnoted as the river itself with all its mystery of light. The Bishop had known Westbury so long and so well that he felt that the homes by which he was passing, all bright with holly, were his homes, that he might have stopped anywhere to share the Christmasing. His slowly pacing feet, however, were bent on the old way toward St. John's Rectory. In the old days the Bishop had always called at the Rectory to greet Barty Judd and his household before church-time, and he still kept to the habit, even though it was so different now at the Rectory.

A flock of sparrows came swooping down through the wintry silence with much chatter, and at the same time there came scudding across the street a little Italian newsboy as shrill and brown as the birds. The Bishop bought a paper, and made the youngster's smile flash as he paused for a few words in his own tongue. Presently, as he went on, the newspaper dropped from the Bishop's fingers, as he fell to thinking of that alien colony down below there, where the river curved, Westbury's strangers. They had come so recently, the factories had sprung up so quickly, that the workers were still the strangers. It is true that the Bishop was well known to those teeming streets as the old man who spoke Italian and who loved babies, but he felt that he had done nothing for these others, really. Eighty years! How barren of accomplishment they looked beneath the searchlight of Christmas! But perhaps there was still time! His step quickened.

As the Bishop passed beneath the shadow of St. John's church, the chimes clanged forth the ten o'clock hour. He glanced toward the door, thinking how calm and gentle and familiar everything was within. After all, his headache had melted away and nothing was to prevent his

presence by the altar on this morning. The quiet of the chancel was restful to his fancy, lying beyond the visit immediately before him.

As he turned up the Rectory steps, tugging slightly on the handrail, the door was flung open, and a tall boy came hurrying out. His thin, fine face was set and black, but a smile played across its frown when he saw the Bishop.

“Good morning, Harry,” said the visitor, “and good Christmas.”

“There’ll be no good Christmas here,” answered the low taut voice, “unless you’ve brought it, Bishop!”

“No trouble here to-day, I hope?”

“Trouble every day, now!” Then remembering dignity, Harry shut his lips, adding more calmly, “Father is not well this morning, Bishop. I am just going out to tell Mr. Edgerton that he does not feel able to be at church.”

“I am very sorry.”

“I’m sorry, too,—sorry for mother and Lois! I am glad you’ve come. It will do them good to see you.”

“And may I see your father, too?”

“I think so, if you wish it. I shouldn’t wish it!” Harry murmured darkly, as he turned about to unlock the door he had slammed, calling in a low note of warning to his mother, and then leaving the Bishop with her in the drawing-room. The shades had been pulled down, the holly wreaths looked dull. A little mouse of a girl came out of a shadowy corner, and the mother’s arm went about the child’s shoulders as the two greeted the Bishop. They both had thin dark faces and intense brown eyes. The girl’s hair was dusky and the mother’s silver, above a forehead worn but un wrinkled. The girl’s dress was white and the mother’s clinging gray, and both wore sprays of blood-red holly.

“Christmas joy to you both,” smiled the Bishop.

“And happy Christmas to you, too, Bishop,” said the mother, while Lois took his hat and cane. He tugged helplessly at his overcoat so that they

each sprang to pull at a sleeve.

“Thank you. There! Don’t let yourself be eighty, Lois. It’s a sad thing to be older than your overcoat.” Then, seating himself, he continued, “Harry tells me his father is not well to-day. I am very sorry. I have been worried lately about him.”

“We have all been worried. It is hard to understand. I suppose,” Mrs. Newbold smiled wanly, “it is just another case of ministerial nerves, but he suffers very much at times. I wish I could shield him from all worry, but I cannot always anticipate what is going to disturb him. We try, the children and I, but I fear we are very stupid. This morning, for instance —” she broke off, “this morning he felt quite unequal to the Christmas service, yet he is worried at not being there.”

“Edgerton and I will manage the service. Dr. Newbold may be quite at ease about that. I hope—”

A summoning bell from above rang sharply.

Mrs. Newbold started, “Oh, Katie is at church,” she exclaimed. “Run, Lois! No, I’ll go myself!” With fingers upon the portière, however, she paused.

The Bishop rose, an odd little flicker in his eyes. “Suppose I go,” he said, moving toward the hall.

The wife looked at him, fighting for a tremulous smile. “There is nothing the matter really, of course. I shouldn’t let you go up. I know I ought to go. But—” she drew quick breath, concluding, “he’s in the study, Bishop.”

Once again as earlier in the day, the Bishop paused before a closed door. An instant he stood there, hesitant, with bowed head, deeply thoughtful, then he knocked with firm hand.

“Come in, of course,” a voice thundered. “Why else should I ring except for you to come in!”

The Bishop was standing quietly in the doorway. At sight of him, the bulky form flung upon the couch sprang up.

“I—I—beg your pardon. I thought it was the maid, or my wife.”

“It is merely your bishop.”

The Bishop’s quiet length sank into a deep chair. His long slim hands rested calmly upon the leather arms.

Dr. Newbold sat bolt upright upon the couch, darting furtive glances at the Bishop from eyes too blue for his reddened face. His right hand, strong and square, clutched a cushion tensely. The nervous twitching of his lips redeemed from heaviness a face clean-shaven but always bearing the blue-black shadow of a heavy growth of beard. There was a pleasant sweep of brow beneath jet hair.

“I am sorry you find me so upset this morning, Bishop. They perhaps told you downstairs—” then he paused, remembering what they might well have told the Bishop downstairs!

“Harry told me you were ill. I met him going out.”

“I judged that he had gone out. Harry’s sole comment on his father’s headaches is slamming the front door!”

“The youngsters know so little about headaches,” answered the Bishop; “that is the trouble, then, this morning, headache?”

“The headache is constant, back here, incessant. But this morning the trouble is,—a case of everything, as the doctor says.”

“What does the doctor say? We must find some way of setting straight this case of everything.”

“What they all say—nerves, rest, less work, less worry, fewer diocesan committees, fewer dinner parties—in Westbury where dining is a cult, and as venerable and as sacred as the church steeple! I might as well toss over one as the other! Suppose I did turn heretic, and refuse Mrs. Hollister’s invitation for Thursday! Could I preach beneath her withering glances next Sunday?

“Or suppose I gave up my bridge with my Senior Warden. The Church needs more card-playing clergy, he says quite frankly. And I’m inclined to think, Bishop, that it does. A little more humoring of men of our good

warden's type, and perhaps Dr. Judd's experiences would be less often repeated. Doctors and dinners be what they will—" mockery and worry both played about the heavy flexible lips, "I have the unfortunate close of that rectorate ever before me."

"You forget!" said the Bishop's voice, low and keen. There was a tiny fleck of red upon his cheek bones. Dr. Judd's forced resignation had been a matter of disagreement between the congregation of St. John's and the Bishop. There was perhaps no connection between the action of the vestry and the fact that Dr. Newbold, immediately called to the parish, had been for years a friend of the Senior Warden, and a prominent co-worker with him in diocesan affairs; the wires of diocesan politics sometimes presented a strange network for feet like the Bishop's.

The Bishop was silent a moment, for the Rector's hand, lying square upon the cushion, had recalled to him the days when he had sometimes involuntarily closed his eyes against the sight of his young secretary's finger nails. It was an exquisitely kept hand nowadays, yet one that looked unhealthily inactive rather than sleek.

"Well," mused the Bishop, at last, "if one can't cut out any of these social obligations, how about the committees?"

Pity for the quick start and the flush of hurt pride, made him add instantly, "Not that the committees can spare *you*. The church needs you, and we should only be sparing you for a little while to save you for bigger service afterwards."

"I should regret," replied Dr. Newbold firmly, while glancing down in some embarrassment, "withdrawing from any service to the diocese,— just now."

"Why just now?"

The Rector lifted his lids for a quick glance, then dropped his eyes again to his uneasy foot, "The affairs of the diocese, as well as those of the church at large, are passing through a critical period."

"Sufficient to justify the loss of your health?"

“I feel that the diocese needs me, Bishop.”

“It needs us all.”

“Particularly now,” repeated the Rector.

A curious subtlety crossed the cameo clearness of the Bishop’s face, “But do you not feel that perhaps the need for your activity might be even greater later on?”

“You mean—,” Newbold faltered, for simple folk like the Bishop were hard to fathom sometimes, even after twenty years of study.

The Bishop’s smile showed, disarming, “I mean simply, lad—if I may call you that sometimes, on Christmas, say,—that the diocese can’t afford to have you break down. It needs, and will need you, too much for that. Therefore,—let the diocese take care of itself a little while.”

“It’s been doing that too long,” the other broke forth, with the brutality of overwrought nerves.

A shadow passed over the Bishop’s clear, gray face. Quick words caught with odd puckering upon his lips. He leaned his silver head against the high, dark chairback, long silent.

“Is it really so bad as that, Newbold?” he asked at last. “What is it that is wrong?”

“Our finances, for one thing. The treasurer’s last report—”

“There must be finances, I suppose.”

The other smiled his cynical, twitching smile, “If there’s to be a church at all there must be finances.” He spoke with the irritation belonging to many a former discussion.

The Bishop’s inscrutable gaze rested long upon the Rector. “You are thinking, and rightly, that I am saved much because I have good laborers in the field to count the sheaves and the shekels? Believe me, Newbold, I know the value of your work to the diocese and I am sorry for the weariness of it.”

The other’s face cleared in still uneasy relief. “I do not feel that I can

withdraw from any office in the diocese, in the church, however small my service.”

“It is not small. You are the most prominent man in the diocese. The most active. The most influential.”

The other flushed with pleasure, yet regarded his guest enigmatically. “Those are cheering words, Bishop, for a day like this, of discouragement and—of pain.” His hand went to the throbbing disc at the back of his neck, as he added abruptly, “If what you say is true, Bishop, I am perhaps paying the price.”

“I am afraid,” answered the Bishop gently, “that you are.”

“One doesn’t expect the strings to snap at forty-five!” Newbold said querulously. “I could have swung a sledge once! I could still! Yet—it makes me wonder—I have wondered lately—what is the secret of your vitality, Bishop.”

The flicker of a smile on the Bishop’s lips, “Yet I had thought, Newbold, that you did not think so highly of my vitality—that you thought it an ebbing flood, a year or two ago.”

The other flushed to the brow.

“It was for your own sake, Bishop, to save you the wear and tear of constant travel, constant work, that I urged upon the convention the election of a coadjutor.”

“I wish you had done it not merely for my sake, but for the sake of the diocese and of the church.”

“It was for that, too,” Newbold murmured.

“It was at any rate not for my own sake that I refused to have an assistant,” the Bishop went on. “If I could have trusted the choice of my clergy! It is easy and natural, to choose the most popular, the most prominent. A bishop’s diocese is dearer than perhaps any one of his clergy can understand. It is my little piece of God’s world, it is my Westbury in large.

“And my ways are the old ways. My assistant’s might have been the

new." He paused a moment chin on hand, then looked up quickly, "What are the new ways?" he asked. "For I suppose my successor will introduce them."

Newbold warmed instantly, moistening his twitching lips, "The ways first of all of economical administration. The church must show itself a good business if we want business men to respect it."

"Do we?"

"Do we *not*?" Nervous lightnings leaped to Newbold's eyes. "These are not days of sentimental idealism, of faiths that float in air. To-day a man wants to see his money's worth in the church as well as out of it. The church," he brought a tense fist down upon the cushion, "has become a business proposition!"

The Bishop's face was intent on Newbold, yet inward and remote. Then the blue eyes smiled, "Oh, but not in Westbury!" he pleaded. "We are not money-mad in Westbury!"

"Because you have so much money! Have always had! Yet the purse-strings are the heart-strings in Westbury as elsewhere. Instance my vestry and the Southside Mission. Closed, three weeks ago. Westbury is wealthy but not wasteful. The mission was unsuccessful, therefore to be eliminated from the items of our expenditure. The need of St. John's, economical organization, is merely an example of the needs of the diocese, and of the church at large."

"I think I was not, was I, officially told of the action of the church, in closing the mission?"

The Rector stirred uneasily, then looked up with boyish directness, "I was remiss, Bishop, and I acknowledge it. But I knew the matter would need full explanation for you, and to be frank, I've postponed a good many things of late, simply because I felt paralysed before them. I'm all out of sorts, not myself at all. I can't tell what's the matter with me."

The Bishop, noting the sudden hysterical flabbiness of the whole face, recalled the man to firm thought.

"The mission is permanently closed, then? That seems to me sad news

for Christmas morning.”

“Believe me, Bishop, I understand your feeling about it. I, too, regret the closing of the mission. I’ve positively enjoyed my work down there.”

“I should think that you might have found the mission work almost restful after the other sort.”

“It was restful. Strangely! They speak out down there, act out, too. The Southside caused me no night-long guessing, like my neighbors here. Yet I had no time for the mission, and lately no money either, for the work has become unpopular, quite naturally.”

“Naturally?”

“I mean the factories and the foreigners have obscured the native population for whom the mission was organized. Social conditions were different a few years ago. It was perfectly possible then for prominent members of St. John’s to work at the mission and yet preserve all the decencies of class distinction. The church would hardly expect a man of my Senior Warden’s type to organize clubs and classes for his own factory hands!”

“Yet might not Christianity expect it?”

“In these days, Bishop, I fear, Christianity and the church are two totally different propositions!”

“You have not lost your power of frankness, Newbold!”

A sudden shadow dropped over Newbold’s face. “Have I not?” he questioned himself darkly, then louder, “With you, Bishop, it is always curiously hard not to say what one thinks. Yet I don’t wish you to misunderstand me. I seem to want to be understood this morning. And you’re the only person in the universe, I believe, who’d take the trouble. It’s not, then, that I don’t myself believe the principles of the Christian religion.”

A smile, infinitely sad and subtle, passed over the Bishop’s lips. “Since you are a minister of the Gospel,” he said gently, “one might hope that you believe it.”

“I have come to believe a good bit of it.”

“To believe enough, lad?”

The Christmas bells had begun again. The voices of the churchgoers sounded on the clear air, but the Christmas visitor sat unheeding.

The Rector’s voice was rasped with the tension of self-defense. “Unfortunately for his health and happiness, a minister of the Gospel has much more to think about than what he believes. He has to think what his own congregation is going to allow him to say and to do; he has to think what the church at large is going to allow him to say and to do. He has to think of the success of his own parish, and of the church, and of himself. All three must please the public or fail. Now my policy —”

“Yes,” the Bishop commented quietly, “your policy? A man of growing influence, like yours, would naturally have outlined for himself his creed and his conduct.”

“My conduct, assuredly, yes. It has been my endeavor ever since I entered the priesthood, and will always be my aim, to establish respect for the church, and its clergy, in the community, and in the world at large.”

“And by what methods?”

“The same that prevail in other organizations, sound business system, and the establishment of social dignity. We can’t expect our young men to be attracted to the ministry unless we can show them something in it worth getting,—they naturally want to get out of it reputation, success, social recognition, as in other professions.”

“You have found those things yourself,” the Bishop’s tone was half comment, half question.

“Yes,” answered Newbold, straightening, “I believe I can say that I have found those things. I started at least without them, as you must well remember—I was a raw enough youngster when I first came to you in Westbury—it is humorous to recall—” he laughed a sharp nervous laugh, then grew instantly grave, “I didn’t have much in those days, but I

did have health.”

“Yes,” the Bishop answered, “you did have,” he paused oddly—“health!”

“I suppose, if the term had not been so much abused that I might truthfully call myself a self-made man. The church has done much for me. I am grateful,—with reservations! That is why I feel that in spite of these diabolic nerves of mine I must go on, must serve the church, the diocese, in its need.”

“Yet you feel,” asked the Bishop wistfully, “that you cannot serve the Southside Mission?”

Sharp sagacity instantly controlled Newbold’s garrulous nerves, “That was a principle of simple common sense, such as might well be applied to other die-away mission chapels in many a parish.”

Very low the other voice, and far away, “Yet the poor are to have the Gospel preached to them.”

“The parent church is open to them,” Newbold answered almost with petulance, “here as elsewhere.”

“You mean,” the tone was strange, “that it would be your policy to close other missions, in other churches, throughout the diocese?”

“It would be my policy,” replied Newbold, setting his heavy jaw, “to cut off all waste until we get our diocesan treasury out of debt. The church’s one foundation,” he added with that daring cynicism that delighted St. John’s in his sermons, “is at present sound finance.”

It was a buffet across the Bishop’s face, making Newbold instantly protest, “It is not the mere money. It is the deep unpopularity of such missions as the Southside with such congregations as St. John’s. Am I to go against my vestry and retain my position? Am I to be a Dr. Judd?”

“You are afraid?”

“Afraid! Impossible! For a man of my make-up,” he smiled in honest amusement, wetting his lips, “I merely have the sense not to become voluntarily unpopular. What can a man do in the face of unpopularity? His hands are tied. He is helpless.”

The room and the man before him sank like a picture curtained from the Bishop's sight. With wide strange eyes he saw another picture. He was unconscious of his words, "*His hands were tied, in the face of unpopularity! Yet He preached the Gospel to the poor,—and to the rich, to the poor rich!*"

There was a long uncomfortable silence, during which the Bishop rested his head against the chair-back, waxen eyelids closed. Newbold studied the silent, sculptured face so long that at last for pure uneasiness he faltered, "I own, Bishop, that I'm no idealist."

The Bishop opened far, clear eyes, "What are you?"

There was a long pause, then still in that far, clear voice, speaking quite to himself the Bishop said, "Yet you will be—"

The room, embrowned, closed against the Christmas sun, dusky with many books, held the two men, who faced each other as once in a lifetime men may.

The Bishop completed his own sentence, "You will be—my successor!"

It was quite silent now, for the bells had ceased and the chat of church-goers. The chancel of St. John's was only a stone's throw from the chair where the Bishop sat, yet it was far from him, the chancel with its peace. But he could still get to church, although late, in time for the communion. One more Christmas sacrament was before him, if only he could hold his brain clear and his body taut, through one short hour more, against the sudden blurring pain in his head.

The silence of the study still quivered with the Bishop's last words, "My successor!"

Newbold sat facing the fact never before so clearly stated by anyone, not even by himself, but clear to him now as the goal of his clumsy, forceful youth, of his anxious, successful ministry, a goal almost near enough now to touch, perhaps. He could not take his eyes from the Bishop's face, transparent as porcelain, now turned into a mask, impenetrable.

"I would not be your choice, Bishop?"

The straight line of the Bishop's lips formed a quiet, "No!"

"And likely enough, I may be nobody else's choice either—in spite of—services rendered!" Then querulous before that intent, gray face that gave no sign, "It's small odds what happens, with this head of mine! Yet I have served and would gladly serve—"

"God?" the Bishop lifted level eyes.

Newbold's thick lips formed for a quick reply, worked oddly, then were oddly dumb a moment before they twisted into a cynic curve from the large teeth. "Harry spoke to me with some frankness this morning. He had just left me when you came, Bishop, a different visitor, it seemed to me. A curious Christmas, verily, if you, too, like all the rest, think strange things of me!"

"Strange things! Are they not true?"

A rush of anger had swept the color to the Bishop's cheeks and shot lightnings to his eyes. The years had fallen from his face like a veil snatched aside. Yet with a torrent of words upon his tongue, the Bishop, looking at Newbold, turned silent. There are some men to whom the sight of one who cringes before a blow deserved is humiliating to their own inmost manhood. The sight of Newbold seated there, from his bowed, brute head, with its too-blue, watching eyes, to his big foot that never ceased to tap the rug raspingly, had caused the Bishop a recoil for which he hated himself. Yet his anger was just, just! The Christ Himself had cried out against the hypocrite, against commercialism in spiritual places. The Bishop, of fine frail fiber as he was himself, remembered the charm for him of the youthful Newbold's provincial crudity and heartiness,—but now, the Bishop thought bitterly, if one wished to make a minister of the gospel, one had better take a gentleman to start with!

He had trusted Newbold at the first, as he might have trusted a son; he had forced himself to trust him afterwards, until this very day. Yet the Bishop now acknowledged that he had known well enough whose influence was at work in the diocese against his own, why certain motions he had desired were tabled in the convention, or if passed, only half-heartedly carried out. How hard the Bishop had fought not to be

aware of a growing evil undercurrent in the spirit of diocesan work! He was far too sensitive not to have felt, as he talked with some of his prominent clergy and laity, his own great simple enthusiasm fall like a baffled flood against a politely concealed embarrassment he refused to understand! But he had understood! He knew now that he had.

Oh, there were powers of evil militant against the faith, the work, to which he had given his life! He had tried not to see them, to believe each man good, especially this man. Yet in this moment it seemed to him that this Newbold, seated there, was the very cause of it all, of this dark Judas spirit that everywhere throughout the diocese mocked the loveliness of Christ within His very church! Again denunciation trembled like a lash, then again was restrained because of a certain dignity in the soul gazing so grimly from the bright-blue eyes, testing the Bishop. It was a face the Bishop had loved and it was haggard as a face in a fever picture.

With all the power of vision innate in him the Bishop saw the facts of his failure. This was the man with whom, more than with any other, he had sought to share his service and his soul. They wore both of them the badge of God's ministry, they were both of them the stewards of Christ's mysteries; they sat now, after twenty years of friendship, two men girt in by four brief walls, yet far apart as two who do not speak each other's tongue.

The Bishop's brow grew tense at the hard thought that it must have been all his own fault! He had walked, as he had thought, beside the Christ, the Friend, yet a man close to him as Newbold had perceived in the Bishop himself no reflection of that Beauty! Oh, it could not be! Newbold must understand! For the very loneliness of it, the Bishop's face grew all wistfulness, as if a child, lost on a city street, should lift its face to a stranger, hungry for kinship. But for all his seeking the Bishop could not find the lad Newbold in the face before him, grown steel-tense with scrutiny.

There was worse than this, too, as the Bishop looked, clear-eyed, on his failure. He must one day leave to this man his Westbury, if not, as chance and choice might direct, his diocese. It had been the Bishop's comfort to believe, sensitive as he had been to the great currents of

unrest and indifference in the world at large, that Westbury had remained exquisitely old-fashioned. Yet it was by the will of the congregation of St. John's that the Southside Mission had been closed, the mission the Bishop had seen their fathers found, with free outpouring of themselves and their purses. Had the Westbury of to-day grown Judas-jealous of squandering both self and money? The Bishop must one day go forth from Westbury leaving it—nothing! And whose could be the fault but his own?

And his failure with Newbold, his failure with Westbury, they were but typical of the failure of his work at large. Of all the gifts of mystery that God gives to man, surely the greatest is the mystery of failure! Wisdom inscrutable that commands work, yet enjoins failure! Mystery of mysteries, that a burning love for that Love Incarnate born at Bethlehem, could not break through the flesh to solace a world a-thirst! The Bishop had loved, yet he had failed to serve. He did not even know how to give peace, as from a chalice, to this harried soul before him.

The worn gray face, intent, gave small clue to the thoughts within. Always Newbold watched, watched, waiting for a word. Which way would it swing, that word? His soul also was poised, waiting.

The Bishop bowed his head upon his hand. He had never felt so utterly alone. Involuntarily, from sheer force of habit belonging to all his moments of unbearable solitude, the Bishop's thought turned to the Friend. He had always understood, would He understand now, despair at failure to God's trust?

Suddenly the Bishop's eyes opened wide and strange. He saw a storm-scourged hill, a mob. Understand failure? What man had ever loved like the Nazarene? What man had ever failed in such transcendent loneliness?

The room fell quiet as a sanctuary. Awed with understanding, the Bishop closed his eyes, to be alone. His thought said, "All other things He has shared with me. He shares also this."

Quiet, long quiet, that at last grew a-throb with pulses. So many the mountains of Transfiguration, and at the bottom always the tumult and the faithlessness. The mental habit of many years steadied the Bishop

as he drew slowly back to the actual: when some sorrow of his own grew too poignant to be borne, he always forced himself to go forth to the person nearest at hand, compelling his mind to the other's affairs. Such effort, although at first it might be so perfunctory that he was ashamed, ended in full sincerity. Too tired to speak now, he smiled over to Newbold his old sunny smile, meaning that all was well between them.

The tension of Newbold's watching snapped like a spent cord. There was a change upon his face, a change in his voice, "Bishop, why did you come to me this morning? They must have told you downstairs that I did not wish to see anyone. Yet you came."

"I had a gift to bring."

"For me?"

"Not now, I am afraid. Still I have no one else, lad, to leave it with. It is for Westbury."

"What gift?"

"One I have been thinking of for a long time. You see Christmas always sets me dreaming, and in these last weeks I've been much shut in, so that I've had a good deal of time to look out of my window and to send my thoughts up and down the streets. I suppose it is because I have been about so little of late that I failed to hear of the closing of the mission, although I knew you were worried about the funds. So I've been happy with my plan. You've listened to my dreams before," the Bishop smiled his little quick, appealing smile, "even though you haven't always—" he broke off, a wistful twinkle of remembrance in his eyes. "I'm still an incorrigible visionary, you think, lad?" The twinkle died. "Perhaps I am!"

"No!" cried Newbold, "No! I—I would have helped to carry out all your dreams, Bishop, if I could, if they'd been practical. Why, Bishop," Newbold smiled the first real smile of the morning, "you're irresistible as my Lois when you want things. Even Mrs. Hollister has to do what you want!"

“Even Mrs. Hollister!” repeated the Bishop wonderingly. “But, of course, for she is my friend.”

“You understand Mrs. Hollister better than I do, Bishop,” Newbold murmured darkly, then could have bitten his lip, for he saw on the Bishop’s face the fine, controlled recoil that told Newbold he had once again said something no real Westburian would have said. Clumsy again, when he was watching himself all the time! Oh, if there was one thing Newbold envied the Bishop, it was his inalienable social grace!

The Bishop’s smile was strangely wrought of sun and sadness. “To go back to my dream,” he suggested, “so far from being prepared for the closing of the mission, I had actually been planning its enlargement.” He grew a little hesitant and shy, “You see I have a small private fortune, not very much, some sixty thousand. I have, as you know, no near relatives. I’m not much of a business man, as you are well aware, and I have also perhaps a foolish reluctance to leaving anything in the shape of a memorial, anything bearing my name,—yet it was here in Westbury, in St. John’s, and at the founding of the mission in the Southside sixty years ago, that there first came to me—the meaning of the Christian ministry.” A moment his eyes grew dream-bright, as he continued, “I’m so in the habit of trusting all money matters to you that I have simply had my will made out to you, without any stipulation as to the object—”

“To me?”

“In trust,” said the Bishop, “for Westbury.”

“To me!”

“I *must* trust you, lad!”

Newbold’s eyes, round with amazement, dropped before the pure flame of the Bishop’s.

“I had thought,” the clear voice went on, “that you would be glad to have the management of this money for Westbury, because it was here in Westbury, and in St. John’s, and in work for the Southside, that you, too, twenty years ago, came to your first thoughts of the Christian ministry.”

“Yes,” muttered Newbold, “twenty years ago!” His foot ceased to tap the floor. He sat straight, motionless, “What, Bishop, was your idea, exactly, for the use of this sixty thousand?”

“My idea—I—I suppose it’s impractical now—was what I called it in my mind, the House of Friendship. Not, of course, that I want it called that in reality. That’s, of course,” he said in quick deprecation, “sentimental in sound, but that’s what I mean.”

“Exactly what?” probed Newbold.

“You know,” the other appealed whimsically, “I left all the details to you even in my plans. I thought I’d just explain the spirit of it. A House of Friendship, that is a settlement house, in connection with the chapel in the Southside, a house open to everybody, to the mothers and fathers and the babies and the little girls and the newsboys, and open—still more open—to the members of St. John’s over here, on River Street, so that the mission and the church might learn, from each other, to be friends. I haven’t gone into the details, although I want to, one of these days, when my head gets a little clearer. The main thing was that you should understand.”

“And I am to understand that your will is made out to me, with no instructions as to the use of the money?”

“Yes.”

“Does anyone know of your desire for the settlement house?”

“No one. You were the only one who needed to know.”

Newbold looked straight at his visitor. “Has it occurred to you, Bishop, that you are taking a great risk?”

“What do you mean, lad?” asked the Bishop wonderingly.

Newbold laughed, a laugh that rang true with honest amusement. “Well, hardly, as we both know, that I should make way with the money for my own ends, or that one cent of it shall be spent except for the object of your desire, but,—” his face grew grave and dark, “you imply, I think, something more. It is not merely the money that you leave in my

charge, Bishop, but the work itself?"

"I had always hoped, lad, to leave my work in your charge. In spirit, if not in actuality."

"Do you hope so this morning?"

"May I hope so, Murray?" Once before, on the night of his ordination, the Bishop had called Newbold by his first name.

Newbold's answer was as direct to the soul as the Bishop's question, "I don't know!" Then sharp and querulous, "How could I? How can I?"

The kindled hope on the Bishop's face died like a quenched flame. In its stead slowly there grew in his eyes their great and brooding pity. "Lad, you're tired to the depths this morning, and I am fretting you with the thought of new responsibilities. Forgive me. I hope that in eighty-one years I've learned to listen. Suppose you do the talking now. What are some of the bothers back of this headache?"

"My head is the chief bother, back of all bothers! It won't let me go on and I can't stop!" Newbold sprang up and then reseated himself at his desk, sweeping a fret of papers aside so that some fell on the floor, then taking up a flexible paper cutter that he kept snapping in his hands while he swung the revolving chair slowly from side to side. "The truth is, I've been going down hill ever since I came here eight years ago. The air of Westbury is knocking me to pieces."

"Yet it agreed with you during your other stay here, twenty odd years ago."

"I was a boy then; I had a different body."

"And perhaps," mused the Bishop, "a different soul."

"Oh, that!" cried Newbold with a shrug, then, "Do you suppose if I'd had my health, I'd ever have let the vestry bully me into giving up the Southside Mission!"

"Yet I used to think sometimes that opposition was the breath of life to you. I wonder," a flicker of whimsical humor in the blue eyes, "if perhaps it would still be the breath of life to you,—if you tried it!"

“Can I fight a spirit in the air? Can I fight, of all things, mere amusement at enthusiasm? Can I fight the impenetrable self-satisfaction of Westbury?”

“Yet I thought you were one who loved Westbury!”

“I love it, yes! And I hate it!”

“Yet Westbury has loved you and taken you in, as it once took me, also a stranger.”

“It has never taken me in! Has Mrs. Hollister ever taken me in?”

“Newbold, may I ask,” the Bishop sought to be patient with a resentful child, “whether Mrs. Hollister has ever shown you the slightest incivility?”

“Never!” Newbold pressed his lips together in a curious grim smile. He studied the paper-knife in his hands intently, “Oh, no, I should not find fault with Westbury. It has given me what I wanted when I came here as a boy, to be rector of St. John’s. I did not perceive then the price a man pays to be rector of—a St. John’s.”

“What price?”

“The price of his freedom! There’s no way to please the congregation of St. John’s, except to *please* them! I’ve learned the trick of that! Ah, commend me to the clergy as latter-day courtiers!” It was sentences such as these, applied in the chancel to his congregation, not to himself, that his people so enjoyed in his sermons, feeling him at one with them in a comfortable, workaday cynicism. Newbold’s words were pressed through closed teeth as he concluded, “But I despise my people!”

“Your people of the Southside, too?”

“They! Oh, no! Poor wretches! They are honest! I understand them! But it is the strain of trying to understand St. John’s that is killing me!” his hand went impatiently to his head.

Serene and low the Bishop’s words, “Then why not go to your people of the Southside?”

“And leave St. John’s?”

“If you do not understand the people of St. John’s. If it is killing you.”

“They would think me a madman!”

“Does it matter, what they think?”

“It has mattered,” Newbold replied grimly, “a good bit, for eight years!”

“And where has that road brought us, lad?”

Silence.

Low, incisive against the stillness, the Bishop’s voice, “Verily you have *had* your reward.”

Newbold’s hands dropped to the desk motionless.

“Yet even so, amid the praise of men, there was one man whose praise you never had.”

Newbold lifted his eyes in interrogation.

“Yourself!” the Bishop concluded.

Suddenly Newbold’s face, set as marble, puckered unbearably. “There’s someone else, too!” Forcing the words out, he quoted, “‘I don’t care if you are a minister. I’m your son, and I know you’re a hypocrite!’ How’s that,” he was furious at the catch in his throat, “how’s that—for a speech—from an only son—on Christmas morning!”

“It is not true, Murray!”

“You are perhaps the only man who believes in me, Bishop.”

“It is because I have known you longest.”

“I am afraid the truth is that your namesake, my son, has the sharper eyes, as well as the sharper tongue. A son’s estimate of his father is doubtless the correct one. Yet it’s an ugly word—hypocrite! I confess it drew blood, and knocked me out for the day.” He looked oddly sheepish, boyish, in his confession, in spite of all the signs of torturing nerves upon a body too vigorous to take ill-health with any poise or patience.

“You see I got up this morning feeling rather out of sorts. I hadn’t slept since twelve. I’ve been dreading the services more and more lately. I’m haunted by the idea of collapsing suddenly before the eyes of my congregation—those eyes!

“Then breakfast was late. If only, only, only,” his heavy fist came down lightly but tensely upon the blotter, “the women would not look as if they expected a scene under such circumstances. I had meant to hold my tongue. But I didn’t. Nobody said anything, so I fancy I continued to fill in the pauses. Harry sat with a face that made me want to knock him down. It was afterwards that he spoke, a full hour afterwards, when I had managed to pull myself together and was on my way to church. He stopped me in the hall with ‘Going to the communion, father? After making mother and Lois feel like that?’ Then he added that little remark about hypocrisy, I came back upstairs, here. Presently you came. A highly successful Christmas! A merry family group, do you not think so, Bishop?”

The Bishop had closed his eyes. This was the kind of thing that hurt his head, and he must keep his head clear, must! “Christmas is not half over,” he said, starting at the thought of the morning slipping by, and the church, so near, calling to him, “There is half of Christmas left!”

“Half a day in which to teach my son to respect me!”

“But this son is Harry. So it will not take so long.”

“Harry is hard!”

“He is generous!”

“He never forgives!”

“Have you ever asked him to forgive?”

“My boy! No! I know him! He knows me!”

“I think perhaps,” the Bishop said slowly, “you will never know Harry, nor he you, until you have asked of him forgiveness. It’s one of the test things, forgiveness. The boy will meet it. He has nobility, Harry, by inheritance.”

“From his mother, yes.”

“From his father, no less.”

“They are their mother’s children, both of them,” Newbold murmured wearily.

The Bishop’s face flashed radiant. His right hand lifted in a quick gesture. “Can any man say anything more beautiful than that?”

“You mean,” stammered Newbold, “what?”

“I think I only meant,” hesitated the Bishop, “that I felt just that way about my child, and her mother. They belonged to each other, not to me. I was only fit to try to take care of them.”

“I have not taken,” said Newbold heavily, “much care of mine!”

“Oh, lad, lad,” said the Bishop, “don’t waste that privilege. It never—it never has grown easy—for me to live without it.”

Newbold’s words came in a whisper, to himself, “She does not expect it now. Perhaps she does not even wish it!”

The Bishop leaned slightly forward in his chair. “Newbold,” he said firmly, “between you and Harry there must be words, as between men. But, for Lois and the mother, downstairs, have you anything to do but to stretch out your hand? It is one of their mysteries, that women always understand better without words.”

Newbold dropped his forehead on interlaced fingers that concealed his face. He was long silent. His hands dropped at last from a face haggard, but a-shine with boyishness.

“Bishop,” he said, “you’ve made me feel a whole lot better!”

“I am glad!” For the first time in their talk the Bishop’s lip showed its slight palsied trembling.

“You always did make me feel better. It is your secret.” Then a shadow fell, “But how? Why?” the shadow darkened. “I don’t deserve it!”

The Bishop studied the darkened face with a sad keenness. “You have

not told me all the worries this morning, have you? What else?"

Newbold stirred uneasily, then brightened a little with reminiscence, "Odd, how little things take one back sometimes. The mere way we are sitting at this moment,—you, Bishop, in that deep chair with your hands on the arms, and I here at the desk,—it makes me feel as if you might take up the dictating and I my shorthand at any instant."

"It does not seem to me so very long ago."

"It strikes me now, that you were pretty patient. I was a raw enough youth when I first came to Westbury."

"A bit truculent in argument sometimes," admitted the other, smiling. "You bowled over some of our best doctors in theology. There wasn't much you were afraid of."

"On the contrary, I was afraid of everything. It was the first time I had ever been afraid, too. Westbury frightened me."

"Yet I knew then that you would live to make Westbury proud of you. I believe I never had such hopes for any young man as I had for you."

"And now?"

"And now?" The Bishop turned the question back upon the man.

"And now," said Newbold bitterly, "where are the hopes?"

"Exactly where they were before. Don't you know, lad, that we old men are incorrigible in hopes?"

"I know that you are, Bishop, incorrigible in hope,—and in patience."

The Bishop's eyes narrowed to fine scrutiny, "Have I then, do you feel, something to be patient about?"

Newbold shot a sharp glance, searching the Bishop's meaning. They both waited. At last Newbold, leaning back in his chair lifted steady eyes. "Since we're talking this morning, Bishop, about the things on my mind, there are, as you seem to guess, more things. I'd be glad to get them all clear with you this morning. It's a relief to talk, no matter where we come out. I'm afraid, that perhaps you haven't always

understood, Bishop, my apparent opposition to your wishes on some occasions that perhaps we both remember.”

“We both remember, yes!”

At the tone Newbold started, grew more vehement, “Oh, if you could but understand, Bishop! Why, sometimes, as I have stood between your desires on the one hand and what I knew to be those of the majority of the clergy and laity on the other, what I knew to be necessary to the prosperity of the diocese and the church, I have verily felt myself between two fires.”

“Or between two masters?”

Nervous irritation fretted Newbold’s forehead. “Yes, I suppose, that, too, in a way, from your point of view, Bishop. The point of view of—well—of the apostles, perhaps!” He hesitated, but then grew defensive, “In practical application, Bishop, it is impossible that the policies of primitive Christianity should prevail in their pristine simplicity in the church to-day!”

The Bishop was long silent, the white profile of his far-away face clear before Newbold’s watching eyes. Newbold spoke at last in anxious apology. “You understand, therefore, I hope, Bishop, my policy, as I understand yours? I wanted you to understand.”

“Why do you want me to understand?”

There was something very strange in those far, far blue eyes, so old, so ageless. Newbold gazed into them, curiously compelled. “Perhaps you know best the answer to that, Bishop.”

A wistful smile touched the Bishop’s lips, “Perhaps I do, lad. For it has been a long while that we have been friends.”

“You know, Bishop, surely,” the man cried out, “how I feel toward you,—in spite of—mere policies?”

The Bishop nodded slightly, “Yes, yes,” then looked at the other with a larger thought. “But, Newbold, I have no policy, I have found only one reading to the riddle of life, and I preach it. There is no policy in that, I

think, is there?"

"I think," said Newbold, quietly, "that you are the only man I have ever seen solve that riddle."

"I have not solved it, Murray, if I have not given you the clew."

At that unbearable sadness Murray Newbold cried out, "No, Bishop, no! If I have failed, it is not your failure! Faith such as yours, life such as yours,—it is impossible to men like me. It is not for us."

"I always thought it was for all." There was a long pause. "And it is. I have not known how to show you, that is all." The Bishop bowed his head in silence, murmuring, "But I wanted you," again a long pause, "as you would want peace for your boy!"

The next words were not to Newbold, but Newbold knew to Whom they were spoken, "Yet I ask so much! We can never share with Him, we who ask fulfillment!" Then the Bishop started sharply from revery, "The service! I must go. It is too late, perhaps, already for the communion."

"There is just time. But, Bishop, will you go? There is so much still to say. Stay a little while!"

"What I have failed to say in twenty years, can I say now? In a little while?"

"Say it!" pleaded Newbold, "say it!"

Like a physical need, like hunger, the Bishop felt the blind desire to feel the chancel quiet about him, to offer once more to his people the cup of Christ. Yet before him here and now, in this silent room, a soul a-thirst.

"What is it, lad, that you want from me?"

"You believe it, Bishop?" Newbold burst forth.

"What?"

"What we preach. I never knew any man to believe it as you do. How?"

"How otherwise?"

"I never knew any other man who had found peace. *How?*"

"It is hard," hesitated the Bishop, "for me to talk about these things—with you. It is hard for me to understand," his tired eyes widened with the effort to understand. "You mean with the Story ever before you, that yet you cannot see—Him?"

"I see nothing. I've come to a pretty dark place in my career, successful, I suppose it would be called."

"Since I've come to be old, I find I don't always call things by their right names. Success and failure, I don't always know how to name them."

"But you have success!"

"No—no, you have showed me clearly to-day that I have failure."

"I have shown you?"

"Don't you remember that I came here with a hope?"

"Which I have destroyed? But, Bishop, the work you describe is impossible to me. You know, no one better, what I am. The amazing thing is that knowing, you still chose me. Why, such a work requires a courage, a conviction, a vision such as—"

"You have not courage?"

"Not, not courage of your sort, now."

"I believe it is courage of your sort, not my sort, that Westbury needs, now."

"It would mean a complete facing about. That would surprise," he smiled grimly, "a few people! I don't know that I should really mind surprising them." Then his face again clouded. "The Southside would find me out, Bishop. I have not the vision. I don't know that I thought it necessary, originally. It's been, however, of late years, a bit persistent, the advantage, say, of believing what one says one believes." The caustic tone changed to intensity, "If I were capable, Bishop, of your faith!"

The Bishop studied him wistfully, "And yet," he mused, "it seems to me so simple, faith, so unavoidable, like sunshine. No man could have made

the sun. Just so, it seems as if no man could have invented—that Beauty!”

“Unfortunately most people don’t see things quite so readily. As for me, I believe I’m incapable of religious vision.”

The Bishop hesitated, thoughtful, then quick words came, “But not incapable of action. I’ve always believed that there is need perhaps for soldiers as well as seers. There’s the fighter somewhere within you, isn’t there?”

“I sometimes feel,” Newbold admitted, “as if there were as much fight left in me as there is in Harry to-day. One sees,” he mused, “some pretty queer things when one looks inside.” Then once more he caught up the paper cutter in restless fingers, “But that won’t last. I seem to see a thing or two while you’re here, seem to be more up to—several things. It will all come back fast enough when I’m alone. You’ll carry this quiet away with you, Bishop.”

“I wish I could leave it with you! Couldn’t I, somehow?”

“You couldn’t, could you, put me back twenty years, and give me another try at it all? No, no, I don’t see the way to that!”

“Do it! Don’t wait to see it! Vision!” the Bishop paused. “It is perhaps true that it is not given to all to see, to feel, to know. Yet those who do not see can act! Perhaps—perhaps—it is more beautiful and more brave to work without the vision! We are the stewards, we call ourselves that, you and I—God puts a cup into our hands. He doesn’t say, ‘Believe,’ or ‘See.’ He only says, ‘Give!’”

“But it is as *you* give, Bishop!”

Their eyes met long. Then the tense pause slackened. Murray Newbold knew best his feeling for the Bishop when he felt the child gazing from the faded eyes and speaking in his pleading voice.

“Murray, will you build, then, the House of Friendship, for Westbury?”

Silence. Newbold had bowed his forehead upon his interlaced fingers. His face was concealed except the strong jaw, and the lips, motionless,

curiously refined by their tight pressure. Moments went by. Within closed eyelids Newbold saw his future. He saw the past as if the issues between himself and the Bishop had been always mounting to this final issue. He saw himself, objective, detached as a painting. So taut were all his senses on this morning that it seemed to him that he should always see the Bishop's face looking upon him just as he had closed his eyes against it, there across the desk. It was a moment of such intense seeing as makes promises impossible. The minutes went, one after one. He could not have spoken a word.

A touch brushed Newbold's shoulder, "I am going now, lad," the Bishop said. Sudden and clamorous, the noon-day chimes, at the close of the service, rang out, as the study door closed.

PART III

The air of the blue Christmas noon was sparkling clear, yet the Bishop's steps were groping. His blue eyes were vague as he smiled in response to motor cars that flashed by, or carriages that passed with a brisk jingle of harness. Groups, lightly laughing in the Christmas sun, brushed by the old familiar figure in the cape overcoat, but they seemed strangers. In the sharp daylight after that dusky study, the Bishop trod an unknown street, as wistful and alone as a lost child. Was this his Westbury, where none of this gay Christmas throng gave thought to those swarming tenements at the bending of the river? An old man's life, what was it, against this hard and happy current? A smile, briefly bitter, darkened the Bishop's face; he was old and would pass, having given his Westbury nothing!

Yet all the time his feet, making for reassurance and relief, were bearing him toward Lucy Hollister's welcome, with the homing instinct of a child that knows one door its own. Across the Bishop's weariness flashed the thought that in the afternoon Lucy would let him lie down for a while.

Lucy's door opened wide to the Bishop. He felt once again, as the closed latch shut him in from that vague and puzzling street, the spell of the wide hall that cleft the house, and of grave old walls showing at the opposite end a picture of the river through broad glass. The Bishop handed his coat and hat to the brown old footman, his friend of many years, then his head cleared happily at the sound of a soft rustle and the tapping of light decisive slippers. Lucy's hand was in his.

"Good Christmas, Henry," she said crisply, and led him in to the drawing-room fire.

"I was worried," she went on. "You were not at church, nor at the house when I drove there afterward."

"The service?" he inquired anxiously.

"It was not Christmas without your sermon. Otherwise it was—well, a

service. For we missed our rector, too!"

"He is ill."

"Is he?" inquired Lucy with musing emphasis. "And of what sickness? Too much Westbury?"

But at the Bishop's troubled glance her tone changed instantly, "But you yourself, Henry, have you been, are you, ill?"

"Not now, not here. It is really Christmas here."

"I am glad," she answered; then, with an unperceived catch of her breath, "if it is really Christmas—here!"

"How many Christmas dinners is it, Lucy?"

"I do not count them," to herself she added, looking at him, "those that are over!"

They fell to talking of the Christmases that were over. The Bishop did not know that from time to time he leaned his head back, closing his lids, and was silent while minutes ticked slowly and Lucy watched him intently. It was comforting when he opened his eyes still to see her sitting there, so alert, so alive.

"So many Christmases!" he murmured.

"I neither own to them," she answered, "nor yet, not own!"

Despite her many Christmases, it was with only a slight stiffening of the sinuous grace of her girlhood that Lucy moved at the Bishop's side, to the dining-room, to the mid-afternoon holiday dinner of Westbury habit. Lucy kept every custom Westbury had had in her youth, and she made other people keep such custom, too; slight, elusive, dominant, as she was, in her great house by Westbury's river. They passed from stately course to course exactly as they had done on that Christmas when Henry Collinton and his wife had dined with Lucy when Annie was a bride, and still earlier, the Bishop could remember dining at that table, when he was a college lad and the two cousins, girls, Annie the dark one, and Lucy, elfin and amber-tinted. The room was the same, the china and the silver the same. Beyond the two long windows ran the

gray loop of the river. Many a time long ago, they had floated all three in a boat on that spangled river. The wall paper was the same, put on by French hands many a year ago. Round and round it raced a French sporting scene, trim-waisted gentlemen that rode to the hunt by wood and stream, and ladies that joined them for the huntsman's repast, gay picnickers all, still vivid in color.

It was all the same, for in Westbury things did continue blessedly unchanged. Lucy was unchanged, for all the long wearing of her widow's black. The yellow still showed in the snowy gloss of her carefully arranged hair. Age had slightly rimmed her eyes with red, but the will-o'-the-wisp still danced in them. Her mouth, netted by wrinkles, was hardly more finely whimsical than in girlhood. As of old, when in earnest talk, she dropped her chin, still clearly chiseled, to a delicate white claw of a hand, flashing from a fall of black chiffon. Lucy treated age as she did people: like them, age could not tell whether it had penetrated her delicate aloofness.

To the Bishop, room and river and woman were still the same. Spent to the uttermost as he knew himself to be to-day, Lucy's indomitable vitality quickened him with sharp hope; perhaps, after all, there was much he could still leave to Lucy! But not yet for him the outpouring, as ever, into Lucy's ear. That would come, but not yet! How happy, now, shut in by that race round and round the walls of those merry picnickers, to pluck, as it were a Christmas gift from a tree, one hour in which they should still be boy and girl together.

As they talked, two faces looked over their shoulders; over the Bishop's a boy's with brown hair flung back, with eager listening eyes, and a mouth that spoke poetry and as instantly laughed out in merry mockery of it, a face that, clear as water, was all the play of a mobile brain; and close by Lucy's head, another in a white bonnet, green-ribboned and green-leaved, from which, framed in red-gold curls, looked out a tinted cameo face, with green-blue eyes, mocking and mysterious. To-day, Lucy's body was still fragile and unbroken, as in girlhood, and for all she had married and borne four children, her soul still went unfettered as when she was a girl. But age had charred the Bishop's face to fine white ashes, in which the blue eyes burned,

luminous and inward.

“Henry,” mused Lucy, “the poetry never came back to you, did it? Do you ever write nowadays, ever snare a little wild, singing poem now?”

“The verses come to me sometimes still, but not near enough to catch, or to *wish* to catch, perhaps. I do sometimes see the pictures still, this very morning, for instance, and I hear rhythms; but, no, I have never written since—since Nan went.”

He was silent a moment, lips tightening, then lights began to gleam on his face, with the familiar pleasure of thinking aloud to Lucy. “But perhaps I do not write because I can no longer distinguish between poetry and prose, in life. That is boy’s work, really, to see the sharp outlines of things that afterwards, for us, seem to overlap, to interweave. Poetry and prose, which is which? Just so the distinction between the sacred and the secular, easy enough at twenty, not at eighty: then the two were clear to me as bars of sun and shadow on a pavement; now the sun-bars would seem all softened with shadow, and the shadow all shot through with sun. Just so the distinction between the divine and the human, God and man, where shall one separate the two? Can anyone say. Just so far,—” here the Bishop, all eager explanation, drew the figure of a cross upon the leather armchair, keeping an ivory finger tip upon the spot, “just so far shall God stoop to man, just so far man rise to God! Oh! no, no!” He erased the imaginary cross with a quick brushing of his long hand, “life is not like that, not sharp distinctions, it is all interwoven, interwoven!”

“So with poetry and prose. How can I possibly write,” he laughed, “if I can’t tell them apart? Why, nowadays I seem to get meshed in my own metres. No, I’m no true poet,” he shook his head ruefully, “if I can’t tell whether a poem is inside of me or outside of me, whether I am it, or it is I! No, old age is the time for seeing, not for singing.” He paused, thinking, “But I verily believe I like the seeing better than the singing.” He looked over to her in the old, quick boyish way, “Don’t you?”

Lucy gave her little humorous shrug, inimitably slight, “O Henry, forgive me, I believe old age for me is all plain prose.”

He laughed his silvery old laugh, in pure amusement, “And that from

you, who know nothing whatever about old age!"

"I! I know everything about old age!"

"Prove it!" he rallied, "prove it! Prove that you know one thing more about old age to-day than you did when you were twenty!"

Her face, still beautiful despite its subtlety of lines, grew strange, and her humorous lips delicately mocking, "No, I don't believe I could—prove—that I know anything more about old age to-day—than I did when I was twenty!"

"There," he cried gaily, "you admit it?"

"Admit what, my friend?"

"That you are still a girl!"

"Yet, a grandmother?"

"One can never somehow remember that," his gaze upon her changed to puzzled thought.

"Yet I am a grandmother, a model mother and grandmother, I'd have you remember!"

"It is very strange," he mused, "mine, who are gone, seem almost nearer than yours, who are here. I sometimes have wondered why you never choose to go to them at Christmas-time. Although it is a happy thing for me that you do not."

"I prefer my Christmas to myself!"

"But isn't it lonely?"

"Lonely, when you have never failed me, Henry!" she laughed. "You know I'm a stickler for old customs. I can't change old friends for new grandchildren."

"Grandchildren!" he shook his head. "No, it is impossible to believe in them! You seem to me still Lucy Dwight of the long ago," a twinkle danced in his eyes, "and aren't you?"

“Who can answer that question but Henry Collinton, of the long ago? Who else remembers?”

They both remembered, and fell silent, joining thoughts.

At length the Bishop, shining-eyed, exclaimed, “Those were great days, when I came here to college!”

“Great days, yes, when I—when we—taught you the town. You thought everything so wonderful that you almost made me believe Westbury wonderful, too.”

“And didn’t you, don’t you, believe it wonderful?”

She looked at him quietly, “But Westbury is my own,” she answered.

“And isn’t it,” he pleaded, “my own, too, by this time?”

“Yours?” she looked at him with far, intent eyes, then before his wide child-gaze, troubled, her smile flashed reassurance, “Yours, surely, Henry!” again she fell thoughtful, “yet it depends a little on what you mean!”

“Westbury *has* been mine,” he maintained, and then, not confident, “and Westbury has not changed, has it, Lucy?”

She was silent.

“It has not changed, Lucy?”

“Oh, no, no, Henry,” she comforted him, “How? Where? Look about and see!”

“Once it sent more men forth into the church than any other place in all the country. Will it, do you believe, continue to do that?”

“Westbury is still churchly! Look at us! Westbury still goes to church. I myself set the example.”

“Westbury always has followed your example,” the Bishop answered; again he felt a start of hope, but still postponed in this pleasant lighter hour the full revelation of his morning’s anxiety.

“Westbury will always follow my example, Henry, just so long as I give it its head. It is a triumph, is it not,” her lips puckered whimsically, “for an old lady to lead a town by a string? If I cared for the triumph! Not to let Westbury get away from me, that has been at least an absorbing pastime. I have spent my life trying to keep Westbury the Westbury of my youth!” Quizzical, darting gleams showed in her eyes.

“There was no more beautiful way to spend your life,” the Bishop answered.

Lucy’s face changed, old age dropped over it like a veil, from which her eyes looked forth, strange.

“I, too,” the Bishop answered, “have wished to spend my life in keeping Westbury the Westbury of my youth. It seemed so beautiful to me! People were already beginning to be in a hurry in other places, but they still had time to be kind, here. They were already locking themselves into classes in other places, but they still had time to be friends, rich with poor, rich with rich, here. You remember the mission, Lucy?”

She started, glancing at him with quick, culprit look, which he, lost in dreams, did not observe, continuing, “Westbury was a place of beautiful friendship, a place to make a young man dream dreams.”

Very low she whispered, “Your dreams, Henry, not Westbury’s!”

“It has not changed, has it, Lucy?”

She did not answer at first, then a smile, elusive, sweet, brushed her lips and was gone, “No, Henry!”

“For how could it,” he burst out joyously, “how could it, when you have not changed, and you are Westbury!”

“I am Westbury?”

“Yes!” he answered, “yes!”

“Have you always thought that, Henry?”

“I believe so, yes.”

But beneath his clear, smiling gaze, the witch lights gleamed in her eyes,

"I wonder if you will always think so, Henry!" But his words seemed to have made her inattentive, restless, so that it was at length almost abruptly that she rose. She turned an instant toward the picture framed by the window.

"How you love this town, Henry!"

"It is my piece of God's world," he answered with that simple reverence that could startle, then he stopped before turning away from the table, "May I?" he asked permission, as he picked up a sprig of holly. "We've had none at the house, and you remember how Annie loved holly."

"Yes," Lucy answered, "I remember—Annie's holly."

The Bishop still kept the spray of crimson berries in his hand when they had crossed the hall into the library, where the fire sprang high and where beyond the twin windows that matched those of the dining-room, the river had turned to slaty gray below the dulling eastern sky. The light in the room was quite clear, but yet the Bishop, in the dizziness that followed his rising and walking from the dining-room, groped for a chair, and sank into it awkwardly, leaning back a moment with shut eyes. For the instant his clear old face looked withered, and his hands upon the chair-arms hung lax.

Lucy was still standing against the fire glow, slight, vivid, imperious.

"Henry!"

The Bishop opened vague eyes.

"I can't let you look like that, Henry, to-day!"

The Bishop smiled, "I'm a bit tired. I've just remembered it. You had made me forget it, as usual, made me forget both the tiredness and some other things. They come back upon me now. I've had a rather rough morning of it, to tell the truth."

"Tell me about it," she said, sitting down.

"I've been hearing things I didn't want to hear, and believing things I didn't want to believe, and trying to do things I couldn't do, all morning. It seems a pretty long time since to-day began. Oh, I was going to do

great things to-day when I got up!"

"But the day is not over."

"That is just it," he answered. "My day *is* over!"

"No, no, it must never be over! You must never speak like that! Why even I—" she broke off, "but you, Henry! Who were always such a boy for hoping! You mustn't stop; I'll never let you!"

He looked at her with a grave, far gaze, "It would be a Christmas gift that I need, Lucy, if to-day you gave me hope. You are the only person who can!"

"What has gone wrong, Henry?"

"It was only that I wanted to give Westbury a Christmas present, and Westbury would not have it."

"Who, pray, had the right to say so?"

"Newbold."

"Newbold! He! What rights has he in Westbury, may I ask?"

The Bishop's glance was startled and penetrating, "Has he none, Lucy?"

She caught back her words sharply, saying merely, "No right to hurt you, Henry, that is all. But tell me about the Christmas present to Westbury. It is some new philanthropic scheme of yours, I suppose. Tell me about it, for you know you might offer your Christmas present to me. Try whether I'll take it, if I am Westbury."



**As before, he knocked, all eager, and again opening doors flashed
ruddy on the night**

His face broke aflame, "You will?" he cried, "I believe that you can!"

"Tell me!" she repeated, dropping her chin upon her white bodkin fingers, and fixing her eyes upon the beauty of his face.

The two clear, pale old faces looked forth at each other across a space, while slowly there drew in about them the mystery of the dusk. Athwart the gathering twilight, the Bishop's voice fell musical and clear.

"The day didn't go very well, not till I got here to you. I got up feeling a bit shaky. I'm going to treat myself to that couch over there presently. Perhaps if my head had been clearer I might have seen better how to do what I tried to do to-day. But I'm afraid the real trouble goes deeper, and dates farther back. Christmas day sometimes throws a light back over the other days and years. I haven't done what might have been done with all the years that have been granted me. I see that to-day. And now it is too late, isn't it?"

"What has happened to-day?"

“Nothing has happened but knowledge, perhaps, knowledge to which I have forced myself to be blind. But in the light of Christmas I had to see, that’s all. And so I suppose I’m a little discouraged, and need to be bolstered up, as you can. It’s a good thing for me that you’ve never had time to grow old, Lucy. For it’s no fun,” his smile flashed, then fell as suddenly, “this being old.”

She fought against his growing seriousness, “I’ve had to stay young, Henry, to keep you from growing old. So don’t go and be old all of a sudden to-day,”—she forced her tone to evenness, “not to-day of all days! I will have to-day!”

“I wanted to-day, too,” he answered, “but I’ve had to give up what I wanted, so far, twice.”

“Who, exactly, is the trouble, Henry?”

“Newbold.”

He paused so long that Lucy asked with the faintest frown of weariness, “Well, and what has that young man done to-day?”

“Young, he is that, certainly! I half forgot it, young and therefore,—” again he stopped, but his eyes were kindled.

“No, not ‘therefore,’” Lucy answered keenly, “if you mean by that that he is still young enough to improve.”

“Not with help?”

“Whose?”

The Bishop hesitated, eyes intent, searching hers, then answered, “Westbury’s, for Westbury has hurt him.”

“Will he profit by Westbury’s help if he has not profited by yours?”

The Bishop mused, frankly anxious, puzzled, “I had been thinking that if Westbury had hurt him, just for that reason perhaps, Westbury—could also help him, and would.”

“Oh, Henry, Henry,” she shook her head with pursed, humorous lips, “you talk in abstract terms. But Westbury is no abstraction. ‘Westbury

could help him.' Exactly what do you mean? For who, pray, is Westbury?"

The Bishop's gaze met hers; there was humor in his eyes as in hers, but also something deeper, something watchful, strange.

"Oh," she laughed, "I remember. I am Westbury! Do you mean, Henry Collinton, that I am to help this Newbold of yours? That I am to make a gentleman of him, if you couldn't?"

But at her words the Bishop's face grew stern, "No, I have utterly failed to make him anything that I wished. But it is arrogant, perhaps, this hoping to make anybody anything. Yet how could I help hoping? He was a splendid boy, and I had no son."

In that stern, brooding silence, Lucy said at length, "Don't mind too much, Henry. Remember you idealize—persons and—towns. He was always out of place here, that is all. He could never belong here."

The Bishop turned his head in the old quick boyish way, "But could he not have a place in Westbury, if Westbury would make a place for him?"

"Incorrigible one!" she smiled. "How?"

Stern age in judgment on his failure left the Bishop's face,—the little sunny child stole back to it. "I have a little hope," he admitted, "but so very small! It depends on you, all of it."

His eyes were all aflame, but his tone was grave. "You know so well how to help a man in his work, how to cheer him on through doubt and failure. Have you ever failed me?"

"I know how to let a man talk to me, perhaps," she murmured.

"Yes, how you have let me talk to you, always,—ever since the mission was founded! Ever since that day we have talked, ever since that day I have brought my work to you!"

"And I have listened!"

"And have helped! Lucy, as you have helped," she felt the sharp intake of his breath, "as you have helped me, could you not also help him who

shall come after me?"

"Come after you? What, whom, do you mean, Henry! You cannot surely mean that he, your Newbold, shall come after *you*?"

"You know the diocese, Lucy, as I know it—can you doubt that—Dr. Newbold—will come after me?"

"Henry, would you, could you, choose that he should? After *you*?"

"What choice have I? I—I am passing on. The sadness is that I would have desired him to follow me, once."

"Now?"

"Will you help him, Lucy?"

"How?"

"Be his friend. He does not believe you his friend. It is the only hope."

"Hope of what, Henry?"

"It seems to me at this moment, the only hope of all that I have desired."

Leaning back in infinite weariness, he gazed into the fire, silently. In the dusky room the fire glow was rosy warm about them, as they sat in twin chairs before the hearth. Silently the old footman had entered, and across the room had lighted and turned low a green-shaded lamp. Lucy sat motionless. A coal slipped down, with a whisper, glowed, and dimmed to ashes.

"What have you desired, Henry?"

The Bishop turned, "You have had all my dreams," he answered, "so you know." A strange mysticism showed upon his face, "I have desired to-day, to give all that I had to the poor, and to the rich, to the rich! And I could not!" At her look of puzzled curiosity, he explained quickly, with a passing smile, "But that is a Christmas secret, between Dr. Newbold and me. And besides, it is all over, now,—that little Christmas dream." Again a long gaze into the fire where one can watch one's wishes glowing, dying. "And I have desired most of all, to leave my work to someone who would understand and carry it on!"

“Who could understand, Henry,” she whispered, “your work?”

He turned his head toward her, quick and sunny. “You alone, perhaps, and therefore you will help him to understand.”

“How?”

“By giving him courage, as you have given it to me.”

“I never gave you courage.”

“Yes! And so, let me believe, you will give it to him!”

“Courage for what? Be explicit, dreamer!”

“Courage to reopen the Southside Mission, and to keep it open,—and every mission throughout the diocese! Let him know that Westbury stands by him there!”

“But if—” she spoke low, “if it doesn’t?”

There was a stab of pain on the Bishop’s face, and then bright hope, “Let him know you do! That will be enough! And besides,” he smiled, “can you not make Westbury do whatever you wish?”

“I never tried,” she answered musingly, “to make Westbury do anything it did *not* wish.”

“I cannot believe,” he cried, “that it wishes the closing of the mission. There has been somehow a mistake. It cannot be. It would mean the going out of a lamp which you and I saw kindled,—it does not seem to me so very long ago.”

“It is a lifetime.”

The light died from the Bishop’s face, leaving on it all the cruelty of age. “Yes, a lifetime that is over,” for a moment his lips showed their palsied working, for a moment spoke an old man’s querulousness, “they could not have closed the mission without my knowing it, if they had not thought me, already, laid upon the shelf!”

“Henry,” she pleaded, “not that, please!”

“No, not that!” he cried, instantly himself and contrite, “we pass, but the work goes on! I am an old man who has somehow made a failure of it. But I’ll try not to think of that any more, clouding our Christmasing. I’ll try just to remember I am leaving Murray Newbold and Westbury, the two I have loved, to you.”

“Leaving! But, Henry, you speak as if I were not also old! What time have I left, for Newbold, for Westbury, more than you?”

“You will have time,” he answered, while the mysticism again touched his face, “my head is not clear to-day, but that is one of the things I seem to know, that you will have time, more than I. Time enough to help Newbold to learn his own strength. He has never tried it. Time enough to teach him to fight. A soldier, he’ll not desert,—afterwards. And time enough to help Westbury rekindle the mission, whose death would mean—you and I know,” his voice fell and he groped a little for words, a little confused, “the light must not die, you will have time to keep the light, to keep Westbury—alive. Your Westbury and mine! I seem to know to-day,” his low voice, in the twilight, was very clear, “that you will have time to help the man and the town I have failed to help.”

“If time were all that is needed, Henry, to help them!”

Looking into the fire, he did not turn, answering happily, “Whatever else is needed you possess, and have given to me for sixty years.”

With the snapping of a lifetime’s tension her voice rang, “Henry, stop looking into the fire! For sixty years you have looked into dreams. Now, once, look at me!”

The Bishop turned.

Her elfin laugh tinkled, “The fairies were good to you, Henry, they gave you eyes that do not see.”

While she spoke, slowly the Bishop saw, but at first he saw only a girl’s witch-face in the fire glow.

“I will make you see this once, Henry Collinton—*me!* You look strange, Henry! As if you couldn’t guess what’s coming. Neither, I assure you, can I. You called me Lucy Dwight of the long ago,—and you’ll have to take

the consequences! I like you to look strange, for then you don't look old! Look young, Henry, and look at me! You are looking, I believe, at last, with open eyes,—looking at a woman, not a diocese. Henry, I might say in passing that I did not think once, on one afternoon we both recall,—but differently!—when we talked about a mission, that we should still be talking about that mission after sixty years. You will excuse my changing the subject from your work for a few moments, then, after sixty years! I've been a pretty good listener—take your turn!”

She looked no longer at the Bishop, who watched her as if she were some Christmas sprite risen out of the red hearth. Her white old face, white-crowned, was touched to rose and gold by the fire flame.

“Shall I draw you a portrait, Henry, of someone you have never seen? Yet it is a portrait on constant exhibition. It is shown to every guest in Westbury,—a private exhibition is called High Tea at Mrs. Hollister's. People watch the guest when he sees the portrait; by its effect he is judged. People point out that the portrait is valuable historically, since it combines inseparably the style of sixty years ago with the style of to-day. That is because the picture has been retouched so carefully from year to year to fit the taste of the times. So the painting is seen to represent the sixty-year history of a town, even to costume,” she flashed a white hand from throat to skirt of her clinging black which looked at first sight so fresh from a fashion plate and was so carefully studied to fit no decade, and no person, but her own.

“Who would ever have thought Lucy Dwight could have stepped into a picture and stayed there all her life? She did not expect to, once, but she made up her mind to it, later, when one day she looked in the glass and took stock of what was left to her. She was twenty then.

“I am proud of the portrait, frankly. I have enjoyed making it. I haven't had anything else to do, except, of course,” a ripple of laughter ran through her tone, “to listen! The portrait needed a frame, so I've made that, too. Your figure of speech was inaccurate, a while ago. I am not Westbury. Westbury is the frame; I am the portrait, the portrait of an interesting old woman, interesting to everybody but herself!”

Lucy was an artist, she knew the value of the pause, she knew the value

of a shrug, the most delicate perceptible lifting of brows and shoulders, she knew the value of hands, that, out of periods of quiet, flickered now and then, spirit-white against the black shadows of her gown. An artist, she forgot the Bishop while she talked and did not look upon the change that grew upon his face.

“It is very easy to be interesting. It only needs that you always guess what people are going to say next and never let them guess what you are going to say next. It needs a gift for words and a gift for silence. It was the process by which I brought up my children. My children have always known they did not know their mother, a course of training easier than spanking and more efficacious.” She stopped a moment. Her clasped hands tightened, “Yet in ultimate effect, at seventy-seven, a little lonely. We prefer our Christmases apart, my children and I.” Her words fell clear against a long silence following, “My husband, of course, spoiled the children. I was perfectly willing that he should; they were his children.”

After a pause, the Bishop, bringing the words forth from far away murmured, musing, “Fathers do spoil children, perhaps.”

Her tone turned tense, “I would have spoiled Nan!” then, resuming her gaze into the fire, upon her portrait, she continued her retrospective analysis, “And I have managed the town as I have managed my family. What Mrs. Hollister says, what Mrs. Hollister does not say, about ministers and missions, about dinners and diners, Westbury waits to know, and I have never let it be quite, quite sure! So Westbury watches, watches me—but oh, not as I watch Westbury! For it would be a little curious and disquieting—if I should cease to be popular! I don’t think that unpopularity would exactly suit—my physique! I am old and accustomed to sovereignty, even if it is, well, a bit monotonous! We were young and lively once, Westbury and I, but now we grow old and wish to be complacent and comfortable, so we don’t poke at each other’s consciences. And, indeed, why should we? For are we not pretty good, when one stops to look at us!” Patriotism deepened her voice, “Where is there another Westbury! We have kept the heritage of our fathers! We have not grown cheap in Westbury!” Then a lighter tone, “And how could we be very bad when we always have had you to

idealize us! Ever since you were a boy! You came to us a stranger and we took you in, at once. We sometimes do take in the stranger at once, and sometimes never. Nowadays he must be presented to the portrait, and must pass that examination. Young Murray Newbold has never passed his, and he knows it. I believe I rather like to see him squirm, for it is not petty, it is a giant's squirming, and I enjoy it because I fancy it has ceased to be perceptible to any eye but mine. It is interesting to observe the effect of the air of Westbury on some constitutions. Your young Newbold would have been worth bringing up once, but he has never learned not to be afraid, and that brings it about that he has parted with every good quality he possesses except his brain. That is still with us, fortunately, for, quite between us, in spite of patriotism, I must say there are not many brains in active employment in Westbury in these days (I'm not, of course, so impolitic as to say 'in these days' to anyone but you, Henry!). We have about half-a-dozen brains in Westbury capable of conversation,—yours and young Newbold's and mine, I forget the other three!" Her laugh died into a thoughtful pause.

"And yet a brain for a woman is a big stupidity. But perhaps I ought not to quarrel with mine, for," she drew a quick breath of intensity, "it has given me all I've ever had! Oh, you and I have had some great old talks, haven't we, here by my old red fire! Brains make—at least—good comradeship!" Her voice fell low, "I sometimes wonder if there is anything better for—men and women—than good comradeship. What—what do you think, Henry?" But still she looked into the fire and not at him, and the Bishop did not answer. For a moment his deep gaze upon her wavered, went to the blackening window,—below there in the wintry garden long bleak stems broke aflame with wee yellow blossoms, beneath them little brown Annie walked among the roses.

"How curiously that holly glistens, Henry!" Lucy's eyes were upon the long lean hands transparent to the fire glow, then suddenly in a voice lingering and judicial, "I really do not know whether it is so very interesting after all to be an interesting old woman!"

Lucy's hands unclasped, fluttered an instant on the chair arms, then lay still, "Oh, I am bored! And I have been bored for so long! It would astonish this town of mine to know how it bores me! There is nothing

new for me anywhere! I know what everybody is going to say and do. If it were not for you, I should even know what I myself am going to say and do! Oh, dull, dull, dull,—this being old! I wish I had something to do! I don't even yet feel old enough to do nothing, yet when have I ever done anything else?"

The fire snapped in the stillness of the room, embers leaping up, the sooner to die to blackened ashes. Lucy's voice grew low and vibrant.

"You wonder why I speak these things to-day? It is your own fault, Henry, my friend! Why do I keep my hearth fire bright except that you should drop in beside it and talk to me? It is quite the only thing left that is entertaining. And to-day you yourself threaten that!" Her voice fell low, "Christmas has always been my day, why this time do you bring with you these terrible thoughts, this talk of—death! Why talk of it, the thinking of it is bad enough! Did anyone ever hear me talk of dying? Except, of course, my lawyer. No, when death takes me, he must catch me first! I shall never go forth to meet him with plans and preparations for the things that shall come after,—and why should you? Why must you talk of your going, speaking as if I could have an interest in your work without you! Oh, Henry, why did you yourself bring the spectre to our Christmas fire, where I wanted to be snug and warm! You are not afraid, but I—I regret to confess it, I am!" Then her tone grew less intense, determinedly casual, "Yet it is curious that I should care or really take the trouble to be afraid! I who am bored to the uttermost! The other will be at least a new thing! But I have never been fond of games of chance! A picture in a frame is dead enough, but a coffin is—ugh!—slightly worse! It is so ugly, this dying! Nobody can ever say I yielded to it before I had to—I have yielded so far, I flatter myself, to nothing! Yet when I must, I shall step into my carriage and drive off with my head up and my lips shut, like a lady! As I have lived!"

She paused, momentarily conscious of his expression, so that to the strange intentness of his watching face she went on, "I never have yielded to the need of a confessional before; if I do so once in a lifetime, you really must excuse me, Henry!"

"Of course, for you it is different, you are not afraid; you are a man, and then you have your religion. But a woman is rarely religious, at least a

woman who has not had what she wanted! As a thinking person, I quite envy you your religion. It is a valuable possession, at this end of life. Not that I am unorthodox—who is, in our good old churchly Westbury? I am a good churchwoman,—that does not enable me to see through a stone wall. Oh, Henry, Henry, here you come to-day, looking so pale that I can't bear it, and talking of going, passing on, leaving your work! You have made me feel how near we are, you and I, to that stone wall. I am sitting here shivering at the strange things on the other side!"

No light but the ebbing fire and the clear green lamp, and somewhere outside in the darkness stars above the swift rush of the river.

"It is this that makes me talk. The time is so short, here, and over there—who knows about over there? One speaks out at last, I find, after being good for sixty years. For I have been good, have I not, Henry, for sixty years,—listened and listened, helped, as you believe, your work? It has been a great thing to be jealous of so great a work! Did you really think my mind was in it, that I really cared,—I!—for missions, for making men over, for turning a town right about face!

"I never expected to speak out; pictures in frames do not expect to speak out. Yet I might have known, for sooner or later everyone does speak out to you. I've been rather proud of being the one exception. But is it not my turn? And yours to listen, to me, just once, at last? You are surprised, I suppose. I am afraid I do not care that you are. I had to open your eyes. You speak as if I existed only to carry on your work—it has always been like that. So I've drawn you a portrait. Do you still think, looking at it, that I am the one to give you hope, I! What do you think, Henry Collinton, of the portrait of Lucy Dwight?"

Her strangely gleaming eyes at last met the Bishop's deep gaze, profound, unfaltering. There was stillness, then the Bishop spoke, in quiet judgment on himself, "My work? Yet I had hoped that it seemed God's. And for sixty years I have thought that you loved it!"

"I have loved you!"

There was no old age for them now, no past, no future. Beyond the room that briefly held them were night and the river and death. She was Lucy Dwight of the flickering fire flame, who laid bare at the last

her deathless desire. The man she loved was God's, was all men's. After a lifetime of delicate sanity, she cried out to him to be for one hour hers. Then she waited.

The singular clarity of the Bishop's brain had annulled for him every other emotion. He no longer felt any shock of revelation. The lucidity of his thinking was like a physical sensation of actual daylight in the room and beyond the windows. He saw the past as if it had been written in a foreign tongue and with a new meaning, but he saw it as plainly as black print on white paper. The woman before him was one whom he had never known, but he read her soul, too, clear as a printed page. So strangely clear his head, it seemed to him he could have laid his hand on that wall of death Lucy had talked of, that it would have crumbled at his touch, leaving him standing on the other side, in this same new daylight, serene and unsurprised. So crystal his thoughts that words seemed to him a remote and frivolous medium, like a grown man's being forced to rediscover his baby-lisp in order to make himself understood. His personal pain had become merely a matter for reflection and limpid analysis. Carried far on thought that ran deep and wide, the Bishop spoke, hardly conscious of his words, "But love *loves!* It does not hurt! You knew me and my faith in you and my hope through you. If you had loved me, would you have destroyed for me that faith and hope? Would you not have taken from my hand my boy and my town, to take care of and to help, if you had loved me?"

They seemed to sit there as if looking on these words, in a silence that grew palpitant. Then her cry broke, "Henry, I can be all that you have believed, I can promise to try to do all that you desire. If you ask me to do it for you! Do you?"

All in that strange daylight within his brain, the Bishop saw the future, saw his work die with him. In the same white light he saw the woman before him whom he had never known.

Lucy waited. God's or hers? Yet why had she loved him except because he had never been hers? The Bishop's gaze rested upon her in a far tranquillity of insight.

"No."

He sat there, quiet as a portrait before her gaze, and all alone. She had desired to rouse him from bodily weakness, and there was about him now no taint of feebleness. He sat erect, his long hands tranquil but not flaccid. A smile touched his lips, so fine and firm, a man's smile, not a child's; a smile of thought in retrospect, neither bright nor bitter. He had believed his lonely life cheered by a beautiful friendship, so sacred that he had supposed it hallowed the shrines of his God, of his wife, even as he did. This friendship had not been what he thought it. Truth was well. He had no friend. There remained God.

"Henry!"

He looked over to her with a far, alien pity.

"Have I lost you, Henry? I was never mad before. To keep you I have been for a lifetime so frightfully wise! Have I lost you now?"

Involuntarily he shut his eyes, the faintest line was pencilled between his brows. Pain struck home again through all that serenity of light. If there was one thing Henry Collinton, the man, loved, it was reserve, the delicate stateliness of their mutual sympathy. Yet here was the nakedness of a woman's soul! Words seemed to him too far away to find or utter.

"Henry, sometimes you seem to me to see only God!"

Still he sat before her, silent and motionless as a portrait statue, as austere and beautiful. His face was in profile to her. The firelight fell on his silver-white hair and filled the eyes that did not turn or see her. Still she seemed to him changed into a stranger. But her words sounded in his head, "Sometimes you seem to see only God!" The Bishop put up his right hand to his brow, suddenly veiling his face from her. Against the strange recoil from her his quick prayer throbbed. So long Lucy gazed at that corded old hand that shut him from her that there grew at last on her face also, a marble sternness that matched his own. She was no longer beautiful beneath that blighting cynicism. Behind his lifted hand, the Bishop did not guess his testing, alone with God as he sat there, praying against this quivering repulsion of his soul. At last Lucy's eyes turned from him to the fire. The smile of a faint scorn caught on her lips! Scorn for herself? Scorn for him? Sixty years of loving? Was this its

issue?

Silence, except for the whispering fire.

The Bishop dropped his hand, leaning back a moment in uttermost relief. From head to foot, he felt, all quietly, some stern tension relaxed, and with it there passed away also something of that intensely clear vision he had just experienced. Looking now toward that other chair by the fire, he knew it was no stranger but the old familiar Lucy seated there, his friend, and how tired she looked and white and lonely! He must try to understand. It was very strange to realize it all, but step by step he must try to understand, even though he felt again now suddenly, and far more certainly, the shutting in upon him of the vagueness and dullness of the morning hours. He cried out to the Friend to hold it at bay a little while that he might talk to Lucy. He smiled over to her sunnily.

As she looked into his eyes that blighting scorn was transformed into a tremulous new beauty, her brooding face suddenly puckered with the painful tears of age.

“Henry, tell me how to live without you! Give it to me this Christmas Day, that gift of hope!”

“I would,” he answered slowly, “if I could! But I haven’t been so very successful in my gift-giving to-day. So I don’t feel very sure of myself. You’ll be patient, won’t you, while I try to understand?” Slowly and humbly he felt his way, with wistful pauses. “There is so much that is new to me, to understand.” Deep in thought he gazed into the past. “You have been very patient with me. I see now how often I have been self-absorbed and selfish, bringing it all to you, every worry. I have taken,—I see it now—much sympathy and given very little. It’s a little late, isn’t it, after sixty years, to ask you to excuse it?” He shook his head with a strange, sad little smile. “How I have talked to you! Always! It must indeed have seemed to you a long, long listening! I am sorry!”

“But I am not sorry, Henry!”

“No!” his face brightened. “For if I have been self-absorbed, you at least can remember that you have been very good to me. That helps, does it

not?" he pleaded quickly. "That thought helps a little toward cheer? For as I try to understand, I do not seem able to look back and read my life without you. You have always strengthened me. You have never failed me."

"Until to-day?"

Her whisper sent a shiver of hurt along his lips, but in a moment he achieved steadiness, holding self at bay. "That!" his breath caught, then low words that grew calm, "But as you said, it is perhaps my turn now, to listen to you. It is only fair, as you said, that I should listen and see, at last."

"I never meant you to see. I always knew what would happen if you did." Her voice throbbed through the dusky room, with strange finality, "And now it *has* happened!"

His eyes met hers, crystal clear, "Nothing has happened," he said simply; "I think nothing ever happens, does it, to friends?"

There was a strange wondering relief upon her keen white face, as she listened for his words, seeing the old boyish mysticism brighten in his eyes. "But let me keep on trying to understand. They cannot be very easy to bear, the things you have been telling me about, all that I have been so dull and slow to guess. It will never do for either of us to let Christmas day go out in the blues. The air seemed full of good cheer this morning; we mustn't lose that, you and I, just because we are being drawn into the evening. You have been cheer itself to me through all these years; if only I knew the word to say to you now! My thoughts don't feel very clear or manageable, but you know I want to find the right word! You who have always known what to say to me." He fell thoughtful and silent, then looked up quickly, "You see it was for that reason that I couldn't help asking you to look after Murray, because I knew what you had done for me. I have had every hope for him, and you know how hard it is for me to give up a thing I have hoped for,—that is why I caught at your friendship for him as the one security now. I thought perhaps there would be for you the pleasure in his brain, in his strength, that I have felt. But no, now I see it cannot be. It would all be too hard on you. I know, of course," he sighed, "Murray's faults. I've

cared too much for him not to know them; that was another reason, my love for him, that made me want to feel that I was leaving him to you, to help him through—what lies before him. But now I see it would be painful and difficult for you—one man who has always brought you all the worry of his work has been enough! And even to-day I have been bringing it all to you still, troubling you with my work and worry and Murray and Westbury! Lucy, believe me, I never meant to be selfish with it! I see at last that I have been.

“And Westbury,—shall we leave that subject quiet, too, as being troublesome to-day? And the Southside Mission and all the other missions, and the spirit that enkindles them, and must be kept alive here and everywhere—one tries to keep the fire alight, but one must go some day, trusting, hoping, not *knowing*, for that is too much to ask! I will try not to trouble you with all that, any more, to-day. It was a good deal, wasn't it, to ask you to keep a whole town—alive! One of my dreams! Such incorrigible dreams they must seem to you, I'm afraid. I am always looking into dreams, you said. And perhaps my Westbury is all a dream, for it has always seemed to me one of the holy places. It does not seem, when you talk, to be that to you. You see, I thought we were one in our love for it,—that is why I talked of leaving it to you—it all sounds now, doesn't it, a little fantastic? Have I always lived in fantasy then? Are you showing me truth at the last, Lucy?”

His voice ceased, weary. His face looked forth from the shadow depths, worn to silver-white by all the years, then, even as he paused, hope ran across it a bright transforming hand.

“It cannot be true! It need not be true! Need it, Lucy? I seem to see—forgive me one more dream,—Murray with you to help him, still keeping Westbury the Westbury of our youth. Of our youth! The old customs, the way of graceful living, you have kept! And now to keep the spirit, the spirit of the place, its simple godliness, its simple friendliness! It has seemed to me God's ground, where He let me walk a little while and serve and then pass on, hoping! Hoping, Lucy?”

“For you, there is so much left!” he spoke a bit wistfully. “Such vigor still and life left in you! It does not matter if the years left are few and late, if they can be so strong and beautiful! While, as for me—” he shook his

head, shrugging his shoulders, smiling, “oh, these poor old bodies that we wear, how they fetter and confine! Yet we mustn’t scorn them too much either, poor things, when they’ve done their best for us for eighty years!”

Something in her listening face recalled him, “Dear me, I am at it again! Troubling you again with the things that shall come after. It was only that I saw before you for a moment—so much! I seem to see so much everywhere, to-day. And yet much of it is sadly jumbled. Your brain never seems to play these sorry tricks on you. You’re feeling patient still, aren’t you,” he smiled, “while I try still to remember and understand?”

Slowly keenness grew in his gaze upon her face, mute before him and subtle. His words were a little hesitant, “I do not believe it is quite true, that figure of a portrait. It hurts us both to think about that portrait, because it is not true. Truly, I think my idea was better than that, that you are the spirit of the place. Yes, I prefer my figure of speech to yours, and so I shall keep it and forget yours. We have known each other too long to believe in that portrait,—it’s such a lonesome notion, somehow! Perhaps you feel like a portrait yourself sometimes when you’re sitting alone by the fire and feeling a little down, as we all do sometimes, I’m afraid, but you surely couldn’t expect me to believe you a picture in a frame when for a lifetime you’ve seemed life and energy to me! So remember,” an instant his voice grew lower, “always remember—” the old twinkle showed, “that I don’t believe a word of it!”

He knew that her eyes, at full gaze on him, frankly showed all secrets, but they were secrets he was not sure he read. Still he was trying to understand, while he paused for help.

“You did not quite mean, did you, that the dullness, the boredom, is all the time present with you? Only sometimes? It is very puzzling to believe ennui of you who seem so alert. You are very brave at concealing it,—you must know the remedy better than I do, for it is one of the things that have not been chosen for me to bear, for I still get up in the morning expecting new things to happen. I did this very day.”

Involuntary mocking pulled at her lips. “New things *are* happening to us

both to-day!"

"Yes!" he murmured, while his face was shadowed, then reverting, "To be dull every day! It seems to me almost the saddest thing you have said to me! I wish it were not so! I wish I had the right word to say for that!"

He sat silent, hesitant and doubtful.

"Henry, say out to me all that you have in mind to say. I need it. There are no veils left!"

His face grew clear with light.

"You are looking into dreams again!" she cried, "but now tell me what you see!"

"What I see for you?"

"Yes, that belongs to me now."

"I think I see for you what might be," he began hesitant. "Mysteriously, there is in you still the power of effort together with the power of wisdom. It seems to me that it is like a cup in your hand, your influence. And if it should be all in vain,—I know to-day that much we desire to do must be in vain. We understand that together, you and I. I feel, you know, as if the soul of a man and the soul of a town were in your keeping for a little while,—if you should take them, might it not be that new thing you want? Might it not bring you joy and forgetting? My work has meant that to me. And I know it is very lonely if one never forgets. And even if it were all in vain, might it not be life and hope to you, Lucy? I do not want to preach any preachments, you know that, surely. I can only tell you what I have lived. Perhaps I have never lived in reality—I half guess it this evening, looking back, and looking forward, seeing all that I have not done. It isn't very easy to grow old, not easy for anyone to feel the body breaking beyond mending, and to see all that is unfinished, but I believe, Lucy, an enthusiasm is the one thing to keep us warm, us old ones. I've done a plentiful amount of failing, but I wish I could succeed in one thing now,—I wish God would let me give you the word of joy to-night!"

It was so quiet in the old room, that low-lighted space, four-square,

swung out upon the night. The Bishop's long fingers passed slowly across his brow, trying to smooth away that darkness which seemed shutting in upon his brain.

"And might not effort new and different help you to forget, Lucy, that wall of death? Perhaps you might be so busy, so joyously busy, that you would come quite to the wall without seeing, and the gate would open so quickly that you would step through without waiting to be afraid. I wish God might let it be that way with you. Perhaps He will. Strange that for me death has always seemed easier than life, so that I've tried not to look at the thought of it too much, not because of fear, because of beauty. It is only lately that I have felt that God will not mind if I look toward the gate. I think perhaps he'll excuse me now, for wanting to get home. They've been waiting for me pretty long, too, Annie and Nan and the baby. He must be a man now. I often wonder by what ways they grow up over there.

"Lucy, I wish you need not be afraid of going home."

Again the Bishop passed his hand over his forehead. He felt himself growing vague, tried blindly to remember what he was trying to say, turned to her at length, appealing, with a strange little smile of apology.

"There is something I am trying to say, but somehow I keep losing it. Can you possibly excuse me if you try quite hard? For I know you've told me something this afternoon that I ought never to have forgotten, and somehow, Lucy, it's gone, it fades, it escapes me! Only it was something that troubled you and that I was trying to understand. But I can't, I can't remember! But I wanted to say something to help a little, I remember that part of it. Lucy, for you and me, is that enough, even if I can't remember what it was all about?

"There is just one thing I can find the words for, before they slip away,—you and I have had to walk through life alone, and yet we have walked together. It was because God walked with us that we have walked together. Lucy, you will remember, whatever happens, that He is always there? And so, that way, you see, we can never be so very far apart!"

They are piteous, the tears of age. Lucy pressed them back with ivory finger-tips on each eyelid, her hands masking all her face. Behind them

stretched the long past, the brief future. The key to the future was in her broken whisper, "After all, God was just; Annie was fit to love you!"

But the Bishop had risen suddenly, and crossed the room blindly, stumbling but once. The crashing pain in his head left only one instinct—air, the street, his own house! Instantly he must get there! Then sharp through his own pain came admonishment. He steadied himself with one hand upon the mahogany table where the green lamp stood. It was the close of his Christmas, he remembered; would it go with no reassurance?

The white panelled doorway behind him, he stood there by the low green lamp. His face was all longing, like a little child's.

"Lucy, I tried; have I given you—hope?"

The Bishop's voice was low, lower than he knew, and it is sometimes impossible to hear or to speak. It was a long time before Lucy's hands dropped from a face a-quiver. She looked about, startled to know herself alone when she felt only him, everywhere.

But quietly the outer door had closed.

PART IV

Stars thriddled the bare elm-boughs overhead. Always against the blackness of the next corner loomed a blurred ball of light, which, on approach, turned into a familiar street lamp. The broad avenue was almost deserted. From blurred light to light ran a space of pavement blessedly firm to hurrying, uncertain feet, yet lights and pavement seemed to multiply and stretch away indefinitely. But if one hurried, hurried on, there was someone waiting at the end.

Sometimes, against the dark faces of the housefronts, window-shades were rolled up, like eyelids opening, on home-pictures that reminded the Bishop it was Christmas night. The morning of the day gleamed through mist like one of the street lamps he was passing. Faces kept forming close against his eyes and then melted again into gray, into black, Mrs. Graham's and Murray's and Lucy's, suffering, lonely faces that had been locked against his pleading. Now there only remained to get home.

A street of black housefronts, closed upon good cheer within, the Bishop's own street, any door of which would have opened readily to his need, had anyone guessed it! But illness had left in his brain only a great homing instinct. He knew he must not stop along the way, because like all other men in all the world on Christmas-night, he, too, had his own, and there, at home, his own were waiting for him. For at last he knew why he was hurrying so, it was because Annie was there, at home. He might not find her below in the hall, but she would be upstairs, listening for him and waiting. He knew that when his key turned, he should hear her voice, liquid and sweet with welcome, come floating down the shadowy stair, "Up here! I'm up here, Hal!"

Yet when at length the Bishop did press his key into the lock, the house was silent and the hallway unlighted and chilly. Still Annie's presence seemed all-pervasive, catching him back to older days, and making him, as he groped for a match and lighted the gas-jet, forget to wonder why Mrs. Graham had not returned or to surmise the train missed for the

baby's sake. As he hung overcoat and hat on a peg of the towering black-walnut rack, his face being reflected to unseeing eyes in the glimmering mirror, the familiarity of the action and the security of his own hallway and open study door steadied and strengthened him. He had got home safe and sound after all, and now before climbing up to bed and undertaking all the weariness of undressing, he would put on his old black velvet dressing gown, and would sit down in the dark, in the sagging old leather armchair, and rest a little, and look out on the stars in the band of night-sky stretching below the rim of the piazza roof.

The door into the hall, slightly ajar, allowed a little light to enter the room, showing the seated figure facing the long eastward window, the black velvet gown sweeping from throat to foot, and the long pale hands stretching out on the chair arms from the wide black cuffs. Hair and profiled face gleamed silver-white in the gloom. From time to time the Bishop's right hand moved to pull the folds more closely over his knees, unconsciously, for he did not know that he was cold. Down below, under the rear piazza, at the grated iron door of the basement kitchen, the man who tended the furnace had set the whirring bell sounding again and again, but all unheeded. The two maids, returning, rang and knocked at all the doors, only to go away, baffled. The Bishop heard no sounds from without.

Near the Bishop's left hand, the corner by the window where the Friend was standing always harbored Annie's work basket. It stood on three bamboo legs, an ample, covered basket, in which the old darning cotton was still, as long ago, a little tangled. Looking toward that little workstand the Bishop remembered that it was Annie he was sitting up to wait for. She was coming in very soon. Or was it Nan he was awaiting? Or someone else?

The flowing lines of the Nazarene's talith melted into the folds of the long curtain close to which He was standing. He was looking forth, together with the Bishop, on the Bishop's town, where he had failed. Too tired to think about that any more, the Bishop only knew that the Friend understood failure. The little quick upward smile showed like a spent child's, too tired to do anything but trust.

Yet the Bishop's thought, in retrospect upon his Christmas Day, was strangely clear, as he looked out on that familiar picture, white stars above in the night-blue and, below, the blackness gemmed by ruddier earth-lights. So dark now, yet so bright with sun and hope in the Christmas morning! His thought went out to the unseen houses, each holding a little group of his friends, following them to the bend of the river until his fancy walked once more among the tenements where he knew the brown babies with their great black eyes, his friends, too.

Of late he had so often looked out on his little city wrapped in night, but not as now. Before, he had been thinking of his Christmas gift, the House of Friendship, which should, in the terms of some strange symbolism, give back to Westbury the beauty it had once given him. But this was not to be. He was quite clear about it all, and quiet. It was night now, and he had not done any of the things he had meant to do in the morning. He had not even gone to church. God's chalice! He had not been able on this Christmas Day to offer it to one soul in all his Westbury!

All day long his hands had been baffled of their gift-giving. That was sometimes God's way, the Bishop knew, as he leaned back in this strange, expectant peace. Suddenly, sharp as paintings torch-lit against a gloom, there passed before him again, as on the black street, those three faces out of his Christmas Day: Mrs. Graham's, black hate scarcely lighted by love for that little Christmas baby; Newbold's, storm-tossed upon a struggle that gave no presage of victory; and Lucy's, seamed with the subtleties of a loneliness that could not see the only help for lonely living. These three faces were, God in his mystery had showed him to-day, only the symbols of his larger failure, in his town, in his diocese. His little garden space hedged in for him out of all the world, he had tended it with much love but with little wisdom. So God would have to take care of it now.

Sharp again, just as the three faces had flashed forth out of darkness and passed close against the Bishop's eyes, came other visions and pictures, those of his Christ-child poem of the morning. Only now it was no sacred city of the Orient, but the dumb and sleeping streets of Westbury where the Child went wandering. As before, he knocked, all

eager, and again opening doors flashed ruddy on the night, to close again with a low dull sound. On and on he fled, a glimmering baby-form blown on the winter wind, until the Bishop's eyes closed wearily from following. He opened them with a twitch of pain, and there without, close against the dark sash the Child was standing, not sad at all, but sweet and smiling. Then instantly this picture, like the others, faded, and again the Bishop knew himself with the familiarity of unnumbered silent nights like this one, seated alone in his study, quiet with the peace of the Friend. Through all the solitary hours of all the solitary years, the Friend had always stood there, clear-figured, by the eastward window.

The night was wearing on as the Bishop sat, waiting. Very soon they would be there. He remembered that he had been looking for them all the day. It would be very cosy to have them coming in on Christmas night—his own!

But at the chiming of those two words through his brain, thought sharply asserted itself, keen and crystalline in retrospect. As a man brings all his life to God at the end, the Bishop looked into the Nazarene's eyes from the picture of the little city that belonged to them both, whispering, "But those out there have been my own."

Presently the silvered head sank back in the sudden drowsiness that falls upon the very old, but even as he yielded to it, the Bishop's eyelids flickered an instant. He looked again toward the Friend, forever clear against the curtained window. He lifted his right hand a little, like a child, not knowing how confident it was. Too tired and sleepy to be conscious of anything at all but that Presence that filled all the room, the Bishop murmured happily, "And I have not been lonely!"

The Bishop did not actually doze off, however, but sat resting quietly in the peaceful borderland of sleep. The threadbare house that harbored him was very silent. From time to time, across his dim worn face, fancies flickered, bright as a caged bird's dreaming. Out of the engulfing vagueness of his brain, Annie came to him, the child-woman of long ago. His boat was rocking at the little pier waiting, as she came tripping down the terraces. He saw the upward sweep of the round young arms as she opened the high wrought-iron gate. She wore a white muslin sprigged with yellow, wide-skirted and flounced. The live brown of her

hair was swept back into a net. Her face was soft olive and rose, her lips parted, and the eyes grave and steady, a child's. On either side about the high black portals of the gate pulsed and flamed wee yellow roses. Slim, sturdy boy that he was, something had shaken him in that moment like a tossed leaf. Even now, old and dim in his chair, it was not the sense of her lips beneath his sudden ones that he remembered; it was that there in that instant he saw her eyes change forever to a woman's. And the boy, all a-quiver with strong youth as he was, he, too, in that moment had changed into a man, a man forever reverent before the mystery he had wakened. The Bishop's hand tightened on the chair arm, for he remembered that at last, at last, Annie was coming back to him. He was waiting for her to come in.

Again thought shifted many a year; and he sat expectant of a knock, light, imperative, merry, Nan's evening knock. The door swung in and she entered, that tall, slim girl of his. She wore a white dress girt about in the absurd panniers of the eighties. Her dark hair was looped low at her neck. She had her mother's brooding brown eyes lightened by her father's twinkle. She sank on a hassock at his knee, folding her long figure up in a trick of grace she had.

"Ready to hear a secret, father?"

As on so many, many evenings, he was ready to hear a secret, the secrets a motherless girl may tell to her father. The Bishop remembered still one secret she had told him which had seemed to be a fine silk thread cutting his heart in two, for the father, listening, knew that the man Nan loved was not worthy of her. Then a tiny smile touched the worn old lips, a smile of pride, half-jealous, at the memory that it was her father, not her husband, that Nan had first told about her little baby. The father's blood, even now, beat faster at the thought of that remembered hope. Then again he saw the wee waxen form on Nan's arm. But instantly mysterious glad expectancy swept that sight from him as he recalled that even now he was listening for Nan's tap-tap at his study door, Nan, once more coming to tell him a secret, a secret blithe, unguessed.

The house had ceased to be silent; there were movings, stirrings, voices, through it. They seemed to be without, on the stairs, and above, in the

upper rooms. There were people on the stairs, mounting up and up on jocund feet. The Bishop heard it perfectly clear now, Annie's voice from his bedroom overhead, "Up here, I'm up here, Hal!"

But listen! There on the hallstair, that was surely a child he heard now! It was little Nan, chuckling and chattering as she climbed. It was her old merry challenge to her father to be out and after her as up she scampered. Yet no, that was not Nan, that merry call was a boy's, a baby's,—it was Nan's baby-boy, who had just learned to go upstairs. The Bishop heard the small ecstatic feet, the slap of exultant little palms on each step achieved. And, like little Nan, the brave wee grandson meant the Bishop to follow him, as on he scurried, up and up, where the stairs were multiplied, were mounting, ever higher, higher.

Again the sounds on the stair changed to other footfalls, lighter, firmer, surer, but like the others, very glad; fleet and pattering, pattering, spirit-light, the steps of the little Christ-Child, going home.

A slight tremor ran through the length of the form seated there, silver and black. Suddenly all mist was wiped from the Bishop's brain, leaving it clear. The Nazarene laid his hand on the window-sash, as if opening a door. "Rise!" He said, "Let us go forth into the morning."

Beyond the silent house, Westbury slept on, the star-lit, throbbing city, not knowing. The deep sleep of the earliest dawn held those three faces of the Bishop's failure, sleep of victors, spent with struggle. In the morning they would awaken, the three the Bishop had loved, to know! In the morning all Westbury would awaken, to know,—that there was only one way to love him now!

In the house of each heart that must perforce hold his memory like a shrine, there could never be any chamber for hate. Through the gift of his three years' presence should the grandmother hold to her breast her baby's baby, until love, overflowing, should enfold that black-mooded woman, her son's wife, and both, being mothers, should learn the way of peace by guiding there the little feet of a little child. This, himself all unwitting, should be the Bishop's immortal gift.

Even so, by divine largess of life given to life, should Murray Newbold become the Bishop's spiritual son. Henceforth, always—instant,

insistent—should the Bishop's presence seem near him at every turning-point, compelling, as in the darkened study on that last day of all their days together.

And the woman who had loved the boy, Henry Collinton, she, too, through his gift of a beauty steadfast to the end, should in the last brief years find ease of her lifelong hunger. In unspoken kinship of loneliness must they draw near now, the man and the woman who had walked closest to him, to rear together his last wish. Deathless as dream should rise the House of Friendship, for, passing, the Bishop had found the way to give himself. It is only a little city where he offered the chalice of his spirit, and only a little space his whole bishopric, yet all the world is richer for the gift of his Christmas soul.

Westbury shall know now,—shining old face beneath the shabby hat, stooping old shoulders beneath the worn cape overcoat, spent old feet that walked these careless streets—Westbury shall know now, their Bishop, passed from them, their own forever.

Yet these things the Bishop did not know, for God was showing him more beautiful things, even as all his life He had been showing him the things that are more beautiful than fulfilment. All happily he sat there in his old study chair, looking toward the eastward window.

His face had changed to a beauty of light. Gently on the chair arms rested the lean old hands, as very softly the gray room brightened at the coming of the dawn.

THE END